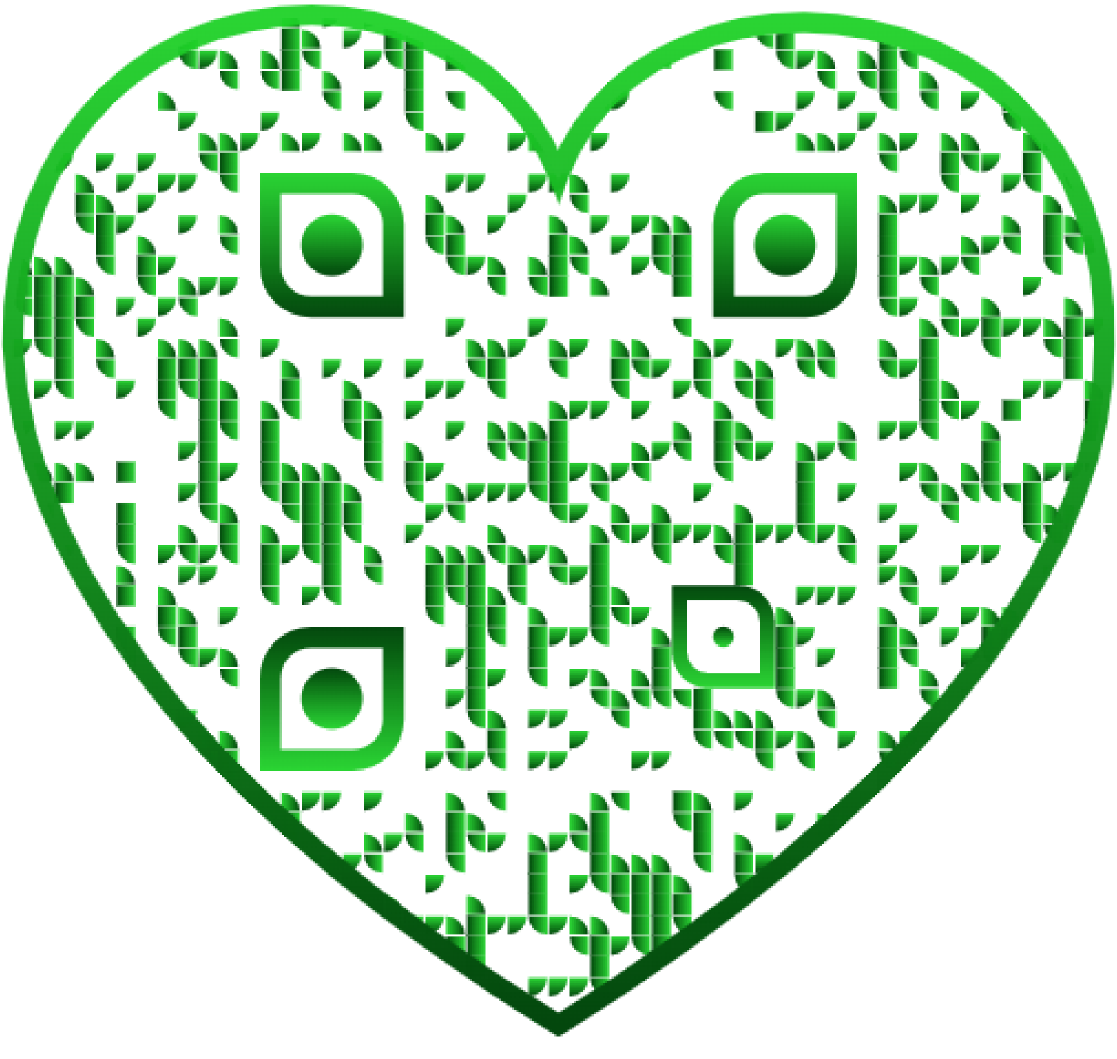
Mapping
the process
since 1949

ArtReview

Lucy Raven

Postcards from the edge



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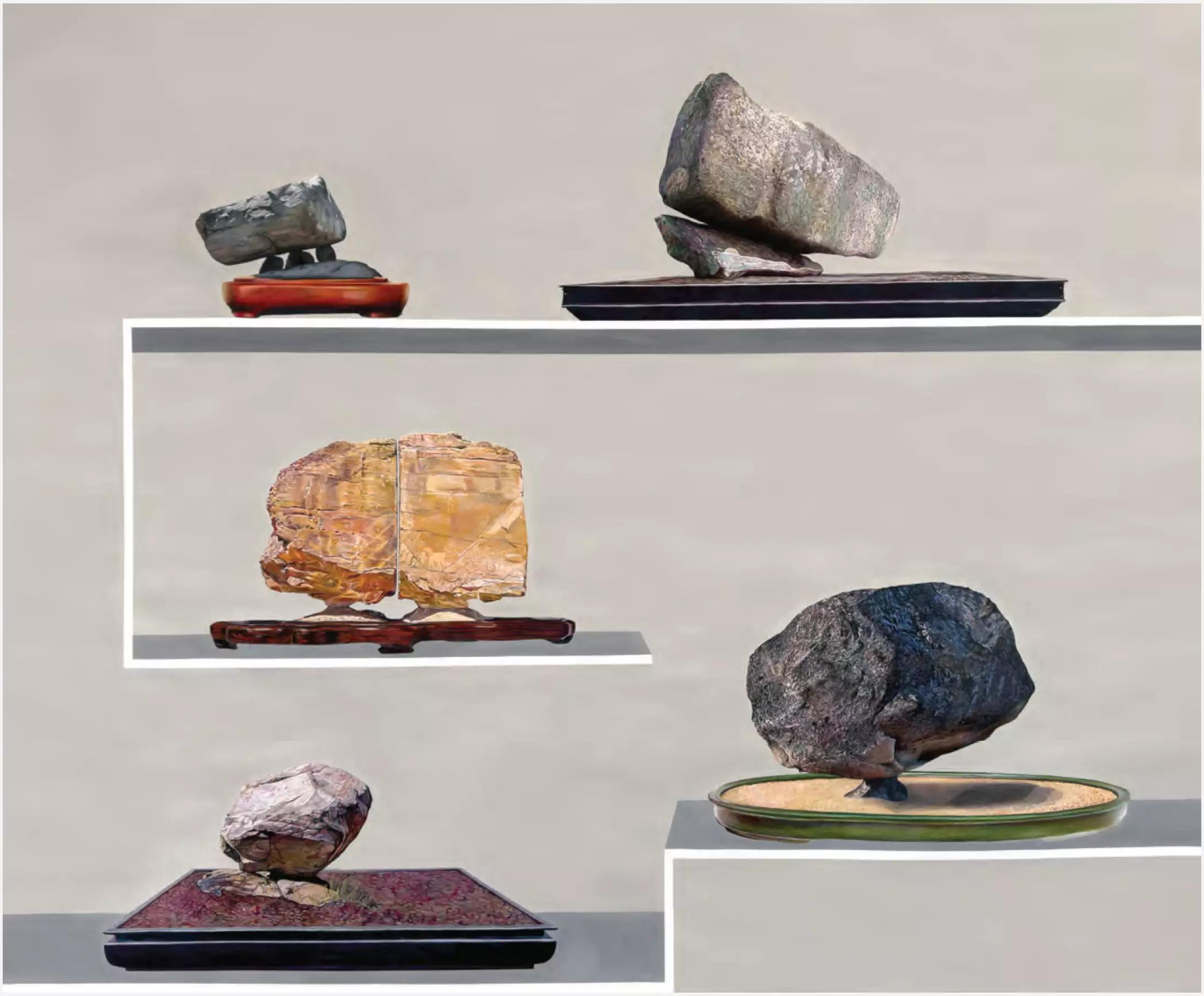

Gala Porras-Kim

Conditions for holding a natural form
2 Sep — 26 Oct 2025

KUKJE GALLERY

Mother and Child (detail), 2007
Colored pencil and
watercolor on paper
24.1 x 20.3 cm
Photo: Christopher Burke,
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Louise Bourgeois

Rocking to Infinity

2 September – 26 October 2025

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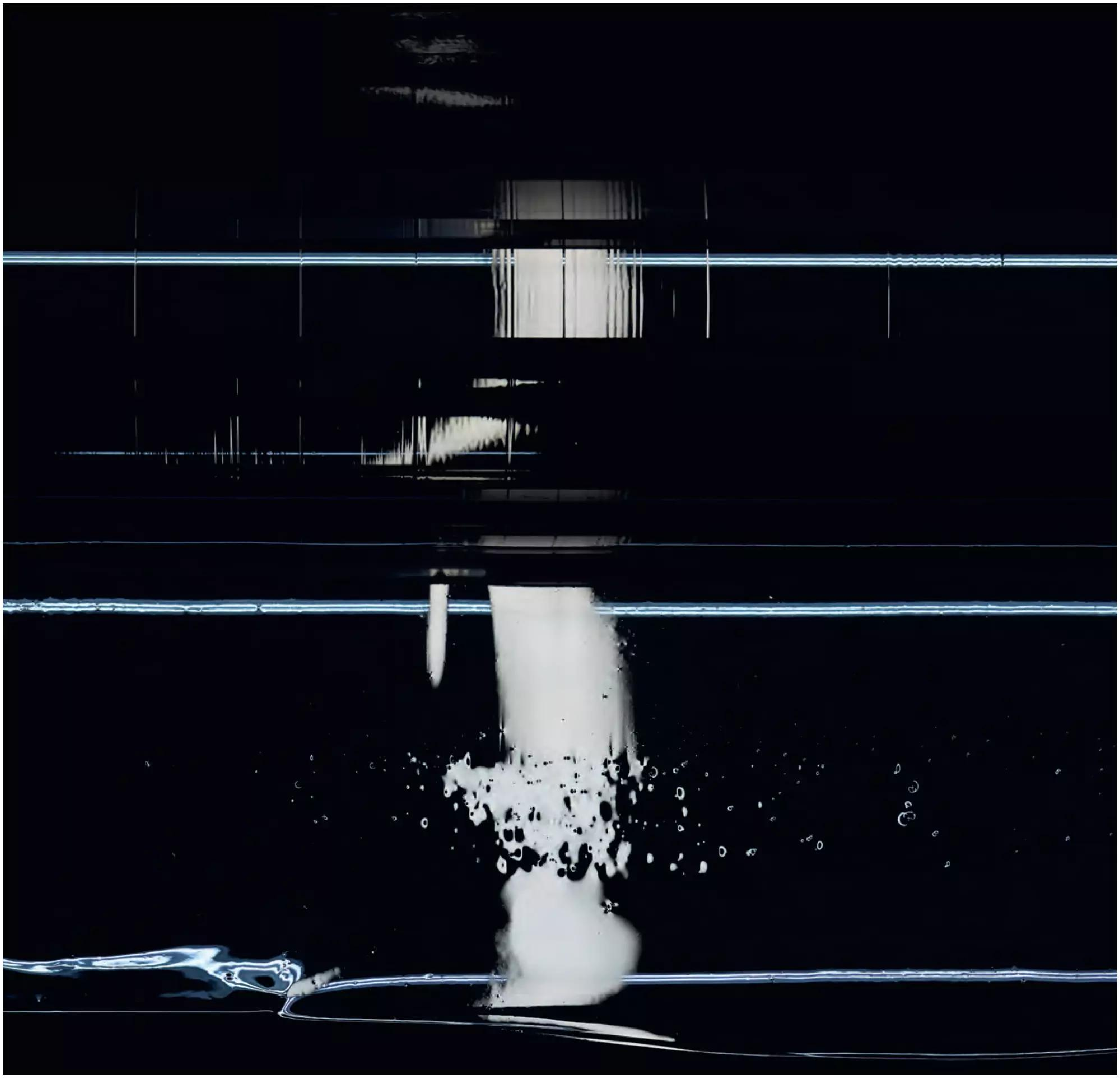
WHITE CUBE



Andreas Gursky, *Untitled XXIV* (detail), 2025 © Andreas Gursky

ANDREAS GURSKY

11 October – 8 November 2025
White Cube, 25–26 Mason's Yard, London SW1Y 6BU

Eva Helene Pade
Søgelys
London
October—November 2025
Thaddaeus Ropac
London Paris Salzburg Milan Seoul

Eva Helene Pade, *Den Fundne (The Found one)* (detail), 2025
© Eva Helene Pade. Photo: Pierre Tanguy

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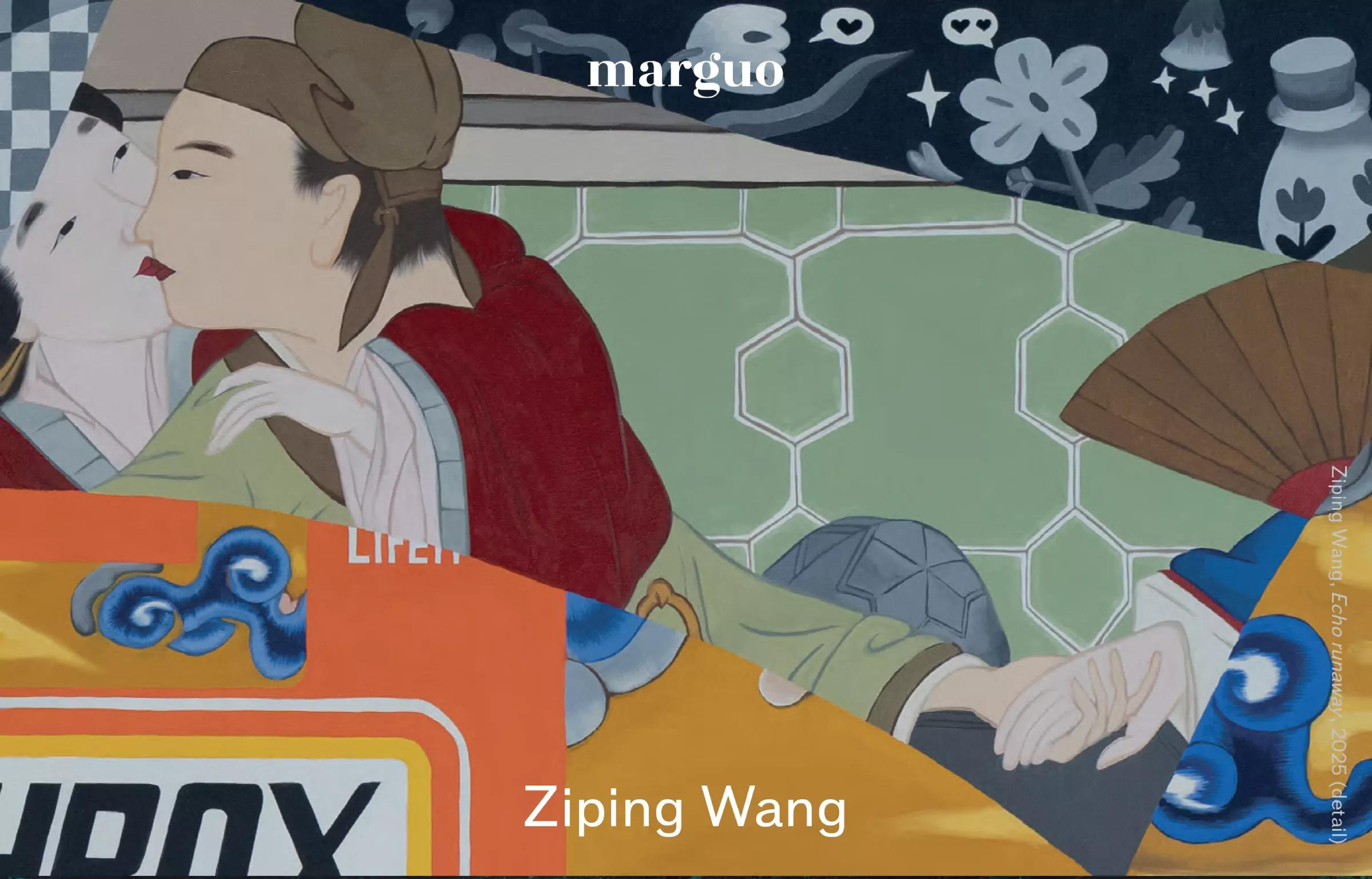
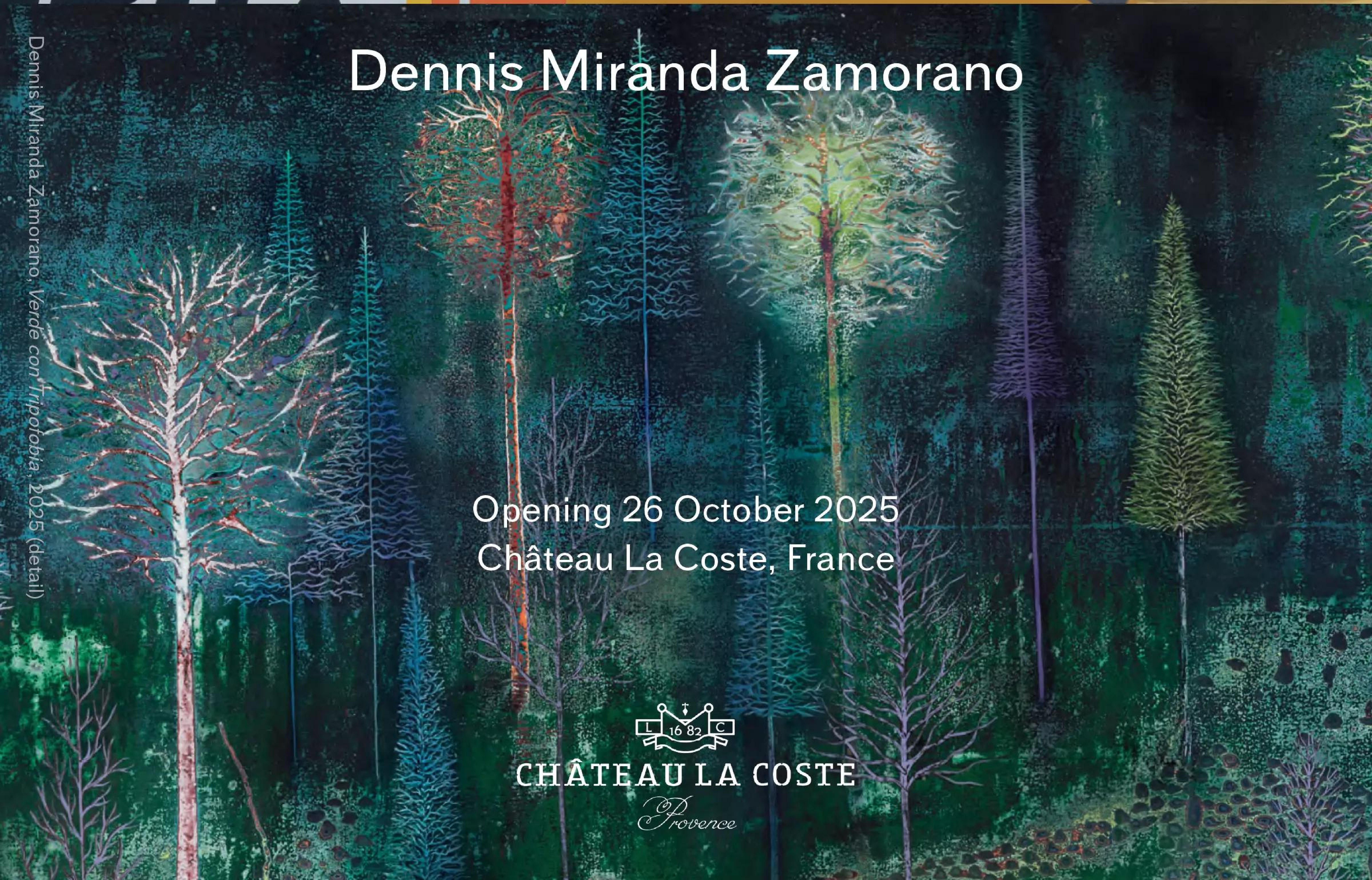


Ziping Wang

Ziping Wang, *Echo runaway*, 2025 (detail)



Dennis Miranda Zamorano

Dennis Miranda Zamorano, *Verde con Tripofobia*, 2025 (detail)

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John

ArtReview, in its present incarnation (the embodied magazine you are holding; not the disembodied voice you are reading), was designed by John Morgan in 2013. He described it, at the time, as 'a calm, simple structure that allows for moments of playfulness'; typically for John, this understated the complex process of thought and experimentation that had led him to reconnect a chameleonic publication to its 1940s socialist roots (aka its identity), while simultaneously creating a space in which all that (its identity) might sometimes recede into the background to allow contemporary art and the documentation of it to take centre stage. Of course, his description was also precisely what *ArtReview* likes to imagine it is and precisely how John actually was. John created designs that seduce without being showy; that conceal a fastidious attention to detail behind a surface of ease. When he died, on 2 September 2025, *ArtReview* lost an inspiration, a collaborator and most of all a friend.

John was one of the most celebrated and influential typographers and graphic designers of his generation. *ArtReview* had looked in envy at the David Chipperfield Architects brand book (2008), as well as at the elegance of John's work with 6a architects and Raven Row, and the typography he had developed for *AA Files* and the *Familiars* series he'd undertaken with Four Corners Books (working with artists including Donald Urquhart and David Musgrave on new responses to classic novels and short stories). For John, clarity and a generosity to the reader did not necessarily mean stark minimalism: 'Let the content speak for itself and don't try too hard' was his maxim. So, while he left plenty of space for *ArtReview*'s writers to breathe (he added an extra 5mm to the width of a magazine, describing the move in tonsorial terminology – which spoke again of his capacity to communicate complex ideas in a very direct, powerful, playful way – as the difference between a skinhead and a suedehead), with the Lexicon typeface (designed by Bram de Does) clipped and clear, and images more often framed with white borders, John revelled in interruptions and messing things up before they got clinical.

A young
man of
extra-
ordinary
personal
beauty

On turning to food photography for a cake that graced the cover of *ArtReview*'s 70th anniversary issue in 2019, John wrote a typically succinct email: *'Phone about to die. What if the middle sponge is naked (just the jam dripping from a jam layer on top of it). Might look less perfect which could be better'*; another unearthed missive concerns possible graphic inspiration for a Power 100 issue, indicative of the humour involved in much of his decision-making: *'I love this from the Compendium of Demonology'*.

In this vein John invariably avoided describing his aesthetic style too precisely (at odds with the precision he brought to the job), preferring to foreground intuition. It's one of the reasons he kept his studio small, rarely employing more than a handful of people. 'Atmosphere is a problematic and woolly word, but it's the best description of what I aim for in my work. It's the sensation you find when you walk into a building or space and it changes the way you feel.'

John was born in 1973 in a small Lancashire village, retaining his accent as he studied Typography & Graphic Communication at Reading University. His father, a biochemist whose real passion was stationery, was an inspiration. The teenage John romped through John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) from his parents' bookcase and at college he'd get a letter from home once a week in a different typeface, the font fully credited.

On graduating in 1995 John took a job in London at graphic designer Derek Birdsall's Omnific studio. On establishing his own practice in 2000, John Morgan studio, he adopted Birdsall's passion for long client lunches and grappa aperitifs. It proved a winning strategy, attracting early commissions from the Church of England, for a new edition of *Common Worship*, the Anglican prayer book (passed to John by Birdsall), and the Design Museum, London.

Maintaining just a few clients at a time, John could turn his attention from pamphlets to pavements: in 2012 the studio created the graphic identity for the Venice Architecture Biennale; and the following year the studio started on a long-term collaboration on the signage system at Tate Britain (a system that must impede as little as possible on the art, John thought). That the creation of brand and style guides (other clients included the Royal Drawing School) formed a recurring motif in John's work was typical of his forward thinking, generosity and open mindedness – he was aware both of the usefulness of leaving trails of breadcrumbs and the reality that others might work with or rework his designs in years to come.

In 2016 John was appointed Professor für Entwurf, Typographie und Buchkunst at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, and in 2017 he set up the type foundry Abyme with Adrien Vasquez. The studio continued working on the day-to-day design of *ArtReview* until 2022, John's 'atmosphere' maintained by the magazine's designers, while the art director's ad hoc emails were as attentive to detail as ever: *'Just needs a tighter crop perhaps. Just sprained my ankle. I'm on codeine and booze, over and out.'*

ArtReview

ArtReview.Magazine artreview_magazine @ArtReview_ ARAsia

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PACE 65 YEARS

Sonia Gomes

É preciso não ter medo de criar

London
pacegallery.com

Raw / Cru, 2025, acrylic, watercolor, fabric, threads, and stitching on canvas, 130 × 93 × 19 cm
© Sonia Gomes, courtesy the artist and Mendes Wood DM. Photo by Ding Musa

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graphic design: deValence

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page 36 *A Better Tomorrow*, dir John Woo, 1986.
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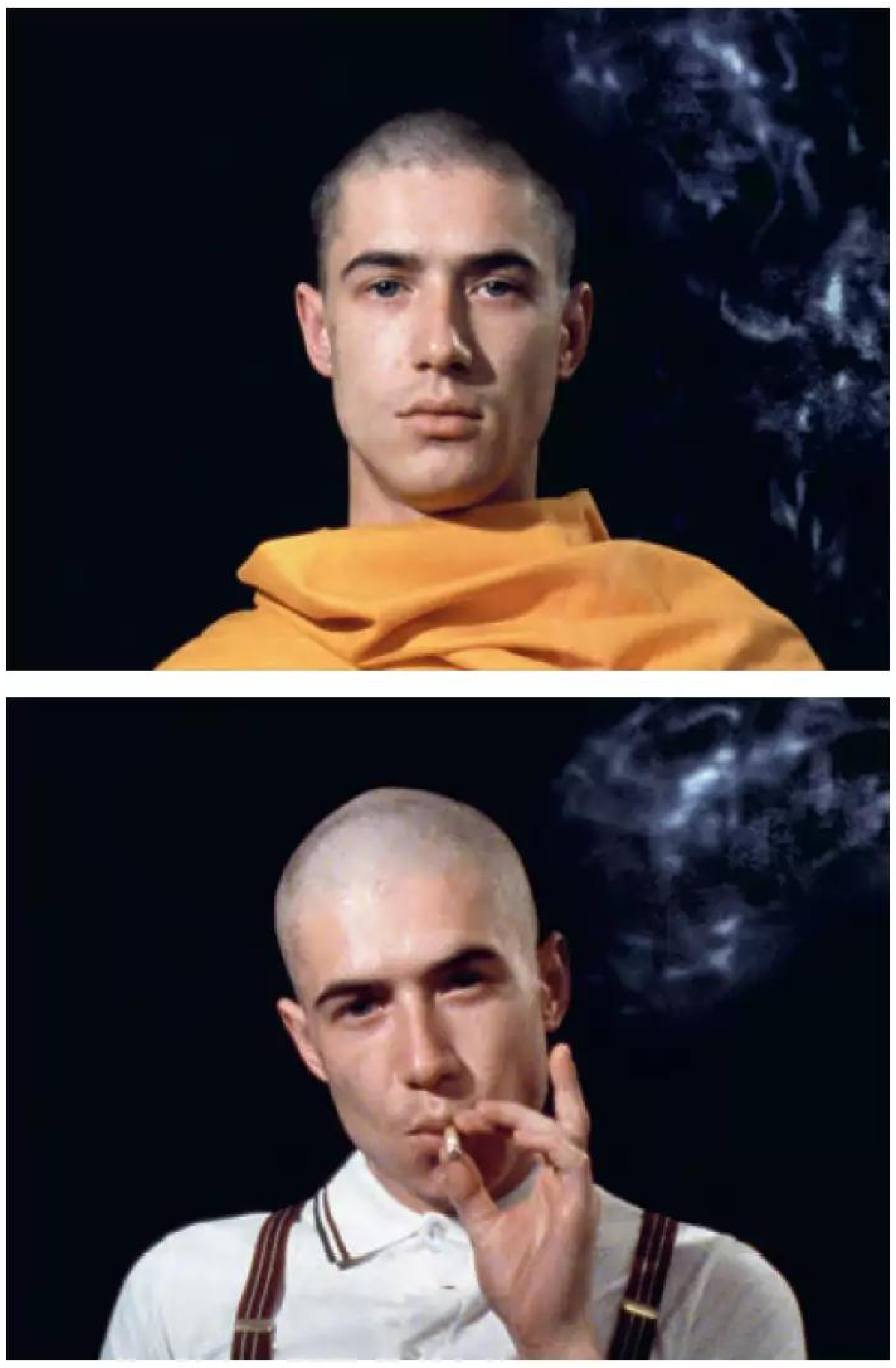

page 52 John Smith, *Om* (stills), 1986,
16mm, colour, sound, 4 min. Courtesy the artist

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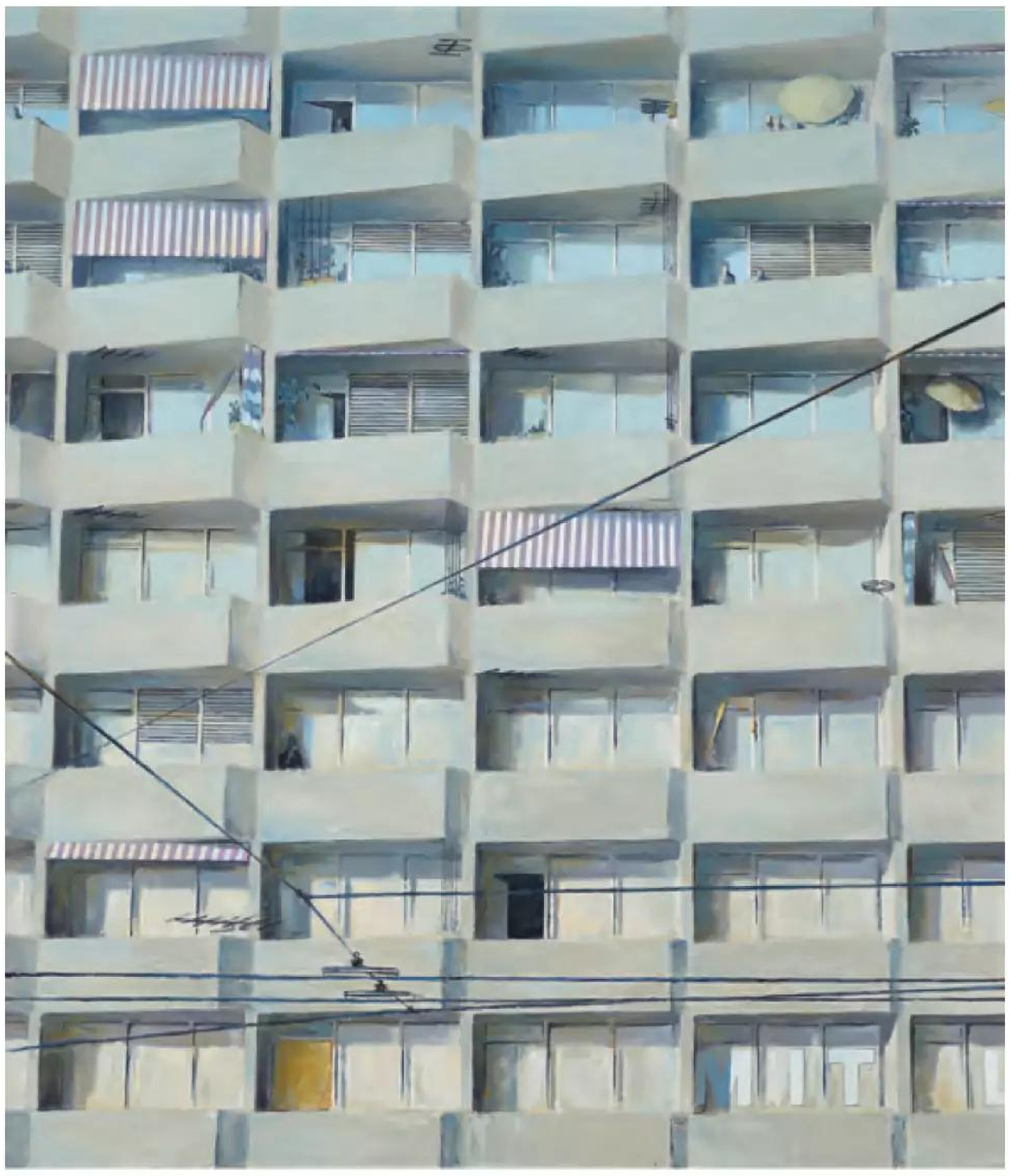

page 90 Wolfram Ebersbach, *Hausfassade*, 1974,
oil on hardboard, 99 × 85 cm. Photo: Michael Ehritt / InGestalt.
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025. Courtesy Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig

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Art Observed

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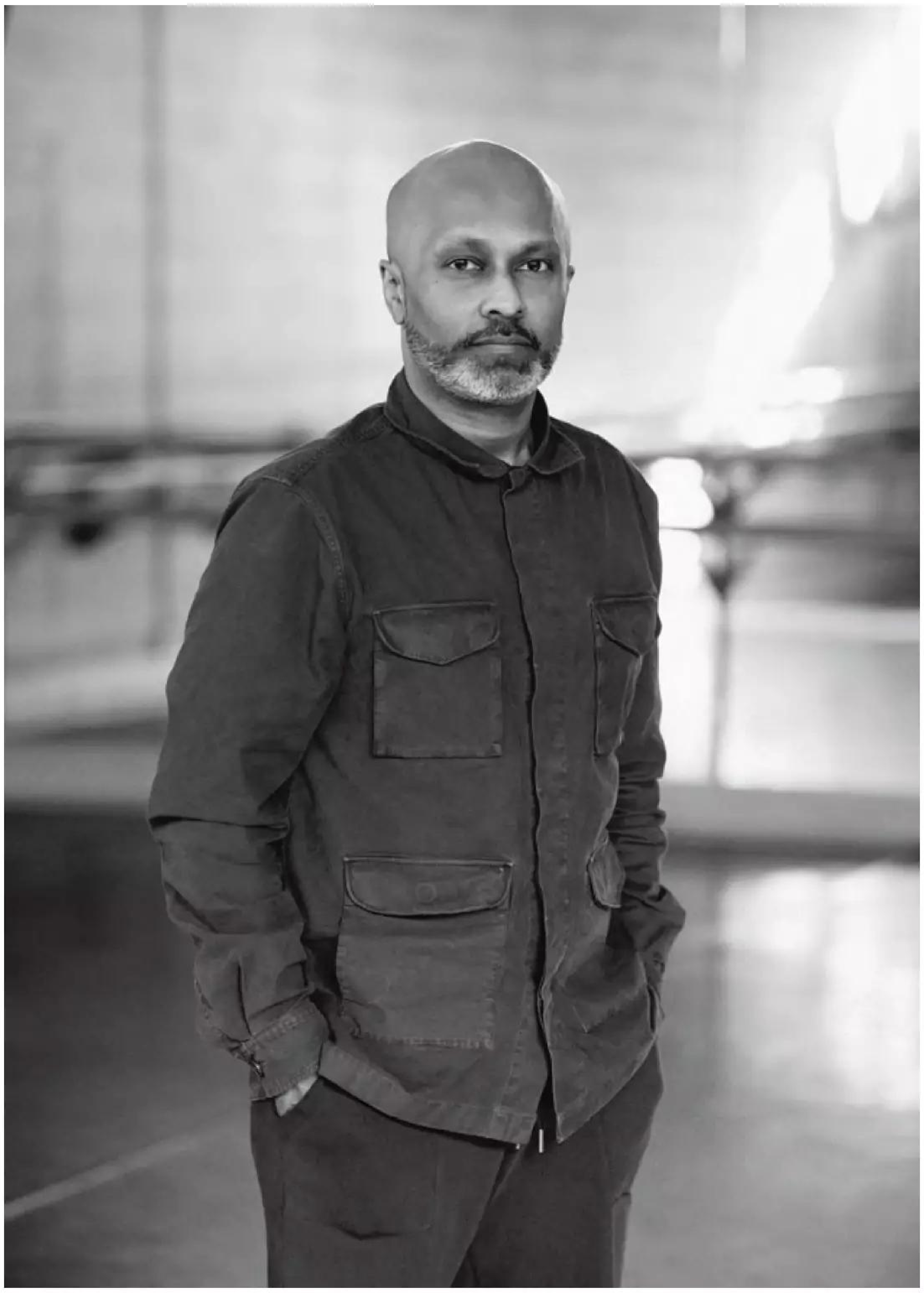


Photo: Camilla Greenwell

by Emily May

Akram Khan

"More and more, we're bypassing process. That's what I'm interested in: the process itself"

The first work that British-Bangladeshi choreographer Akram Khan saw by Saudi artist Manal AlDowayan was *Now You See Me, Now You Don't*, a 2021 installation of circular trampolines dotted across the desert in the Saudi governorate of AlUla. "People just turned into children trying to jump higher and higher," Khan recounts on a Zoom call from Moncalvo, Italy, where he has been teaching over the summer. "All of us were trying it. I thought, she [AlDowayan] must be literally bonkers… I really want to meet her." The result was that AlDowayan became a key collaborator on Khan's latest production, *Thikra: Night of Remembering*, helping to shape a stage set – what Khan describes as a mountain- or cavelike structure – and a storyline inspired by AlUla's cultural history. Infused with themes of ritual and remembrance, the piece premiered outdoors last January in the parched landscapes that inspired it.

According to Khan, the experience was deeply spiritual: people were guided through the desert at night, offered tea, wrapped in blankets and surrounded by incense as the all-female cast of performers arrived in a 15-minute procession before beginning the performance. While that experience would be impossible to recreate onstage, he notes, "the theatre has its own magic". Audiences will see an indoor version of *Thikra* as it tours France, Germany, Italy and the UK this autumn.

Over the past 25 years, the fifty-one-year-old Khan has established himself as one of the leading choreographers on the international dance scene, celebrated for his seamless fusion of Kathak – the classical dance form of North India – with contemporary influences. The results have ranged from a 2016 retelling of the Sanskrit epic the *Mahābhārata* from the perspectives of its female characters to a 2022 postcolonial reimagining of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), exploring themes of climate change and migration.

Thikra will be the final touring production by Khan's eponymous company before he and his longtime producer, Farooq Chaudhry, pursue new creative directions after a quarter of a century of collaboration. As Khan prepares to embrace the next stage of his career, the themes of *Thikra* feel especially resonant. 'It's a personal and spiritual reflection on remembering – on what we choose to carry forward and what we must lay to rest,' he wrote in a press release. Which memories, lessons and ideas will he hold onto, and which will he let go as he moves forward?

The Wisdom of the Maternal

ARTREVIEW *What was it about AlUla that inspired you to create* Thikra?

AKRAM KHAN The most important thing for me is finding an entry point into a particular place or culture. For *Thikra*, there were several hooks. One was going to the desert and being in the presence of such epicness. Until you go there, you can't imagine the scale of it, how small you are in comparison. The second thing was connecting with Manal. She showed me the beauty and complexities of the people of AlUla. She's not from there, but she works a lot with the locals. Through her, I met one of the tribe leaders. Nabatean tribes were in AlUla way before our history began. The city was on the incense trade route, so there was a lot of exchange. Judaism, Christianity, Islam… many cultures and religions coexisted here, but the Nabateans are older than all of them. So, using Manal's lens, I wanted to focus on the stories of AlUla through the Nabatean tribe.

AR *Which stories stood out to you?*

AK One of the most important things was witnessing the power of women in those communities, the quiet sense of authority they hold. Culturally, these tribes have an ingrained celebration of and surrender to the knowledge and wisdom of the maternal. Of course, in all cultures and religions, you find the patriarchal world trying to control things, either through erasure or submission. And we've become more patriarchal than ever before. So it was really beautiful to discover, through Manal and Um Firas – the leader of one of the tribes – how people in Saudi see [the Western world]. But AlUla is not quite Saudi. It has its own culture. That's what I fell in love with.

AR *You ended up working with an all-female cast of dancers, inspired by your encounters with the Nabatean women.*

AK I knew people were going to think it was a political move, but it wasn't. I'm very aware of politics, and I'm very suspicious of all countries. But I'm not suspicious of the people who actually live and work [in them] – people who work with the earth and understand the fragility and the power of that relationship. In tribal culture, women are not usually allowed to perform for strangers, especially for men. Um Firas had researched me and wanted her granddaughter to show me this traditional hair dance – which is ironic, because I don't have any hair! [We were at her house, and at one point] Um Firas started dancing too. Manal turned to me: "She's never done that before, and she'll never do it again. She's doing it because she feels comfortable in front of you." It was a very beautiful moment. That movement became our starting point.

AR *How did experiences like this come together to shape a cohesive narrative for* Thikra?

AK The story is about a ritual led by a tribal leader. Women are trained to perform this ritual for the village to bring one of the ancestors back. The spirit comes from the earth, comes alive, and then has to be embodied. It's not a sacrifice, but one of the women becomes the vessel for the spirit, living it physically for a brief moment before returning to herself. [In *Thikra*] there's a mother bringing back her ancestor, who was a princess.

AR *Exploring the concept of remembering through dance is interesting. As an artform it is often described as ephemeral, ambiguous and fleeting – characteristics cited as the reason for its marginal place in museums and history books. Yet, as your work shows, embodiment itself has long been a vital means of transmitting knowledge across generations.*

AK What you're describing is very matriarchal and connected to nature. Museums that pin things down and control them – that's patriarchal. Why is it 'his'-tory? Why is it not 'her'-story? Because history is written predominantly by the Western men who win wars.

If It Isn't Seen, Does It Exist?

AR *You're best known for reimagining Kathak vocabulary with contemporary dancers, blending the two forms together. For* Thikra*, though, you worked predominantly with dancers specialised in Bharatanatyam, another Indian classical style. Why?*

AK It's difficult to convince contemporary dancers – unless it's already part of their cultural world – of the intangible: the idea of feeling something without showing it. If it isn't seen, does it exist? Hindu mythology and Indian classical dance are built on embodiment, on the belief in gods who are not physically present but represented through statues.

There are some contemporary dancers in the *Thikra* cast, like Azusa Seyama Prioville, who is Japanese and plays the mother character. She naturally carries this sense of spirituality. But it was hard to find dancers I didn't have to spend too long convincing. We're living in a world of immediacy and efficiency, but to make something truly profound takes effort and time. More and more, we're bypassing process. That's what I'm interested in: the process itself. Indian classical dancers understand that.

The Body Should Have Always Been the Top Genre

AR *You collaborated with AlDowayan for this production, but you've also worked with many other visual artists over the years, including Antony Gormley*

all images *Thikra: Night of Remembering*, 2025 (performance views). Photos: Camilla Greenwell. Courtesy Akram Khan Company

and Anish Kapoor. In a Financial Times *interview last year, you said, 'I think the dance world has partly been hijacked by visual artists and curators, because that's where the money is.' Could you elaborate on that?*

AK I think there is an element of colonialism there. It's the Western colonial approach – concepts and ideas are regarded as higher in the hierarchy than experiential ideas.

AR *Higher than craft, too?*

AK For sure. Everyone can have a clever idea, but it's about how you use your craft to make that idea experiential. Dance festivals used to celebrate dance, but don't anymore. Anything experiential, anything about dancing, is regarded as cheaper or lesser. In contrast, someone doing something conceptual is regarded as more intelligent.

AR *I felt similarly at this year's Venice Dance Biennale, where Brazilian theatre director Carolina Bianchi won the Silver Lion for outstanding contemporary choreographer – even though the work she presented was clearly a play, privileging words and concrete ideas over the more open, poetic language of movement.*

AK Dance doesn't have financial clout because it's ephemeral. You can't buy a dance show and put it in your living room. So I understand why there's more money in visual arts. But what people don't realise is that those visual artworks, too, come out of the body. Your body is the most important temple you'll ever have in your life. When you get ill, you realise that no brain can resolve the pain your body will endure, or what you'll go through when it fails you. The body should always have been the top genre.

AR *The body is becoming even less present in today's technology-centric world, which centres digital over physical experiences.*

AK I find the modern world very problematic. And it has been problematic for a long time. Through a lot of cruelty, it erased and destroyed a lot of tribal traditions that have been there for thousands of years because it thought it was superior. Now, it's almost like our civilisation is unwinding. We're going to erase ourselves, our own species, through our own doing.

AR *This year marks the hundredth anniversary since the development of quantum mechanics. I've interviewed several artists working with quantum principles, and all have pointed out that they simply confirm what tribal and Indigenous peoples have understood for centuries. Concepts such as the multiverse and entanglement existed long before Western society 'discovered' them.*

AK You can find multiple universes in Hindu mythology. [They're discussed] through [words], colour and music. That's the only difference – we [explore them] through storytelling rather than data.

You Need to Hear the Other Side

AR *On the topic of anniversaries,* Thikra *will be your last work for Akram Khan Company, which you're closing after 25 years to pursue other projects. Why is* Thikra *a fitting final production?*

AK I love the fact that it's all women onstage. Most of my protagonists and antagonists have been women, mostly because my mother was instrumental in feeding me mythology. She always told me stories through the viewpoints of the female protagonists: Adam and Eve through Eve's perspective, Jesus's story through Mary Magdalene's perspective, Bhishma's story through Amba's perspective. The list goes on. It was only later that it clicked. I didn't know she was poisoning me!

AR *I love your mum already.*

AK Many years later, I was fighting with a lot of other academics about the fact that my version of these stories was completely different. I asked her, "Why did you do that?" She said, "You're going to get the male perspective anyway. In order to have humanity and empathy, you need to hear the other side." She had a huge influence on me.

Artists Are Not Politicians

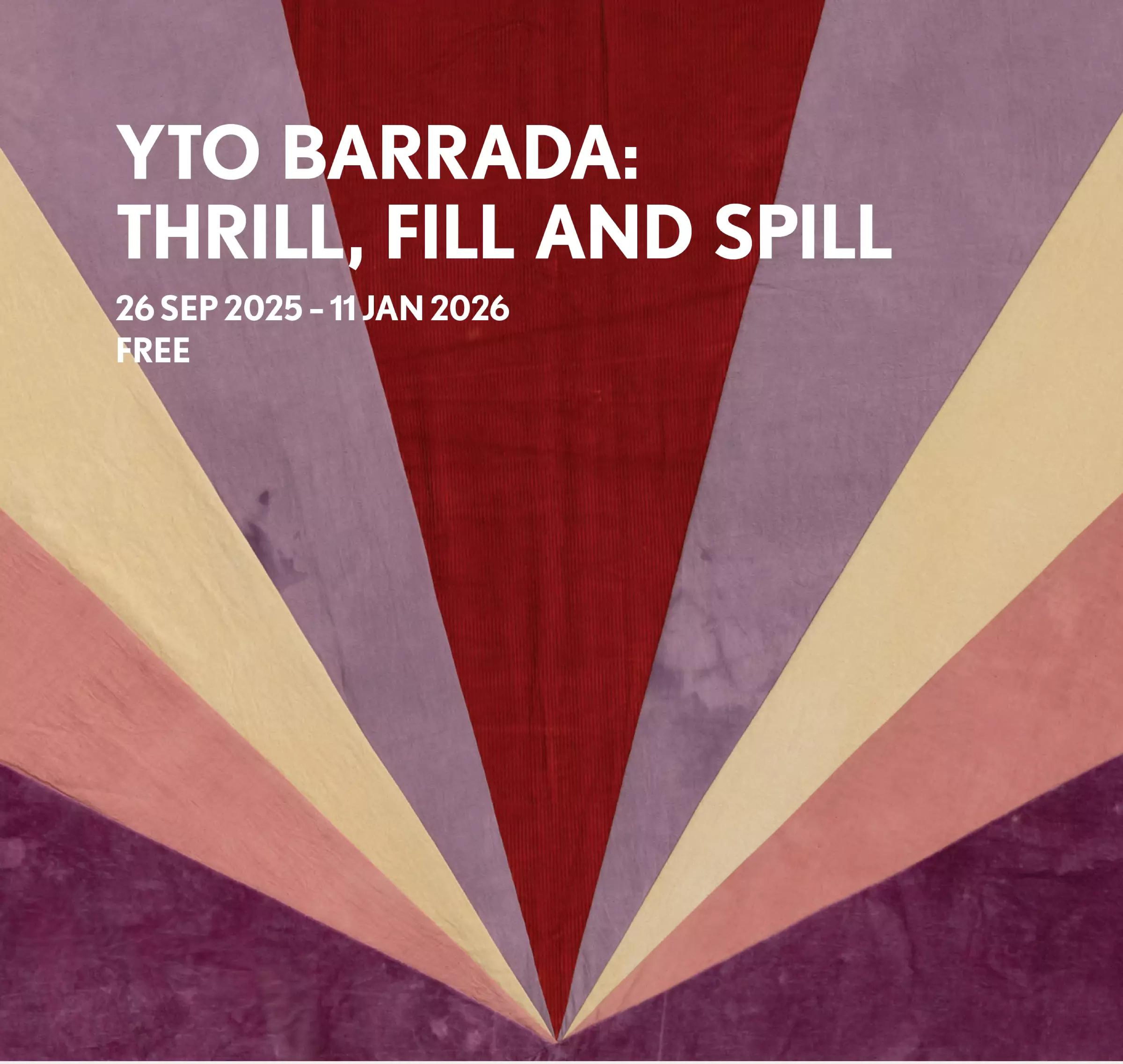
AR *Over the past quarter of a century, a key part of Akram Khan Company's identity has been its commitment to connecting worlds, cultures and generations. In increasingly divided times, what role can dance play in nurturing unity?*

AK We have to be very careful to acknowledge that [artists] are not politicians. We can act in small ways, but it doesn't have the biggest impact. It's not going to stop the wars happening unnecessarily right now – the most inhuman wars you can imagine.

We're living in very dark and dangerous times – not for just one particular culture or tribe. The only tribe that matters to those controlling the world is the one symbolised by the colour green: money. It's not about people. It's always been about power and money. As artists, we can reach out with our hearts and our work. But policy changes the world, we don't. Not on a real scale.

Akram Khan Company's Thikra: Night of Remembering, *by Akram Khan & Manal AlDowayan, will be at Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, 2–18 October; Sadler's Wells, London, 28 October – 1 November; Romaeuropa, Rome, 5–6 November; Berliner Festspiele, Berlin, 11–12 November; and Tanz Köln, Cologne, 19–20 November*

Emily May is a writer and editor based in Berlin



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Karimah Ashadu
Tendered
10 Oct 2025/22 Mar 2026

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Karimah Ashadu, *MUSCLE* (still), 2025. Courtesy of the artist, Camden Art Centre, Fondazione In Between Art Film, Sadie Coles HQ and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.

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Pay to Play

Much of the most innovative published writing is unpaid, but would you work for free?

asks *Joanna Walsh*

I was drinking in Slattery's in the Rathmines Road after an opening with a Turkish queer feminist filmmaker with a DIY punk ethos, and an Irish experimental musician. She was like, *let's do the show right here.* He was, *yeah but I want to get paid. I'm a professional*. They both had day jobs in academia: insecure, untenured work that doesn't pay much, barely enough to support their practice, never mind their lives. And yet they took different positions.

Like a lot of people who emerged from the Web 2.0 boom, I made my name working for free. I started writing in the online literary mags of the late 2000s and early 2010s. They paid nothing but they bypassed the gatekeepers of the paid mags I'd later write for, to which I'd likely never have had access without the portfolio I built up online. During the mid-2010s I was an editor at one of them. We didn't pay but nor were we paid. Commissioning and putting out two pieces a month may not sound like a lot of work, but it is. My rubric was to source writing so uncommercial it couldn't be published elsewhere. Despite my personal guideline, several writers whose work I published early in their careers went on to work with Hamish Hamilton and Penguin. I like to think I have an eye, but this was also, perhaps, an unpaid self-internship.

I still get requests to work for free. Most of them are from the UK, where the big Arts Council England money goes not to artists but organisations (in 2024 Creative Scotland closed its Open Fund for Individuals). But where will those institutions get their artists? There are those old enough to have benefitted from state funding to develop their careers, and there are those who have personal finances to sustain and develop their work – a shrinking and increasingly exclusive demographic. There is no doubt that the arts in the UK are becoming less class diverse, more difficult to access for anyone who, like the majority of the UK's population, doesn't have the kind of independent wealth it takes to grow a practice unsupported.

It's arguable that UK writers have long been in an even worse position than artists. They used to do it for a case of wine. That was the notorious payment offered to some speakers by the Hay literary festival during the 2010s. The Everyman Wodehouse Prize for comic literature, hosted by the festival until 2019, still awards the winner a jeroboam of Champagne, as well as naming a pig after the winning novel. Sadly, unless you're Bertie Wooster-level rich, producing even comic writing is no joke if you can't pay the bills and the rent. The workers who put up the tents, did the catering and drove the taxis for the Hay festival didn't give their skills for a trickle of Beaujolais, and in 2015 the UK Society of Authors put their collective foot down and boycotted not only Hay but the Oxford Literary Festival and others for fair pay.

The second time last year one small UK indie publisher asked me to make work for them for nothing – or rather, for less than nothing (one request involved my paying for travel and accommodation in order to present the work I would have made for free), I wrote to the organiser: *Do you think this is something it's ok to normalise?*

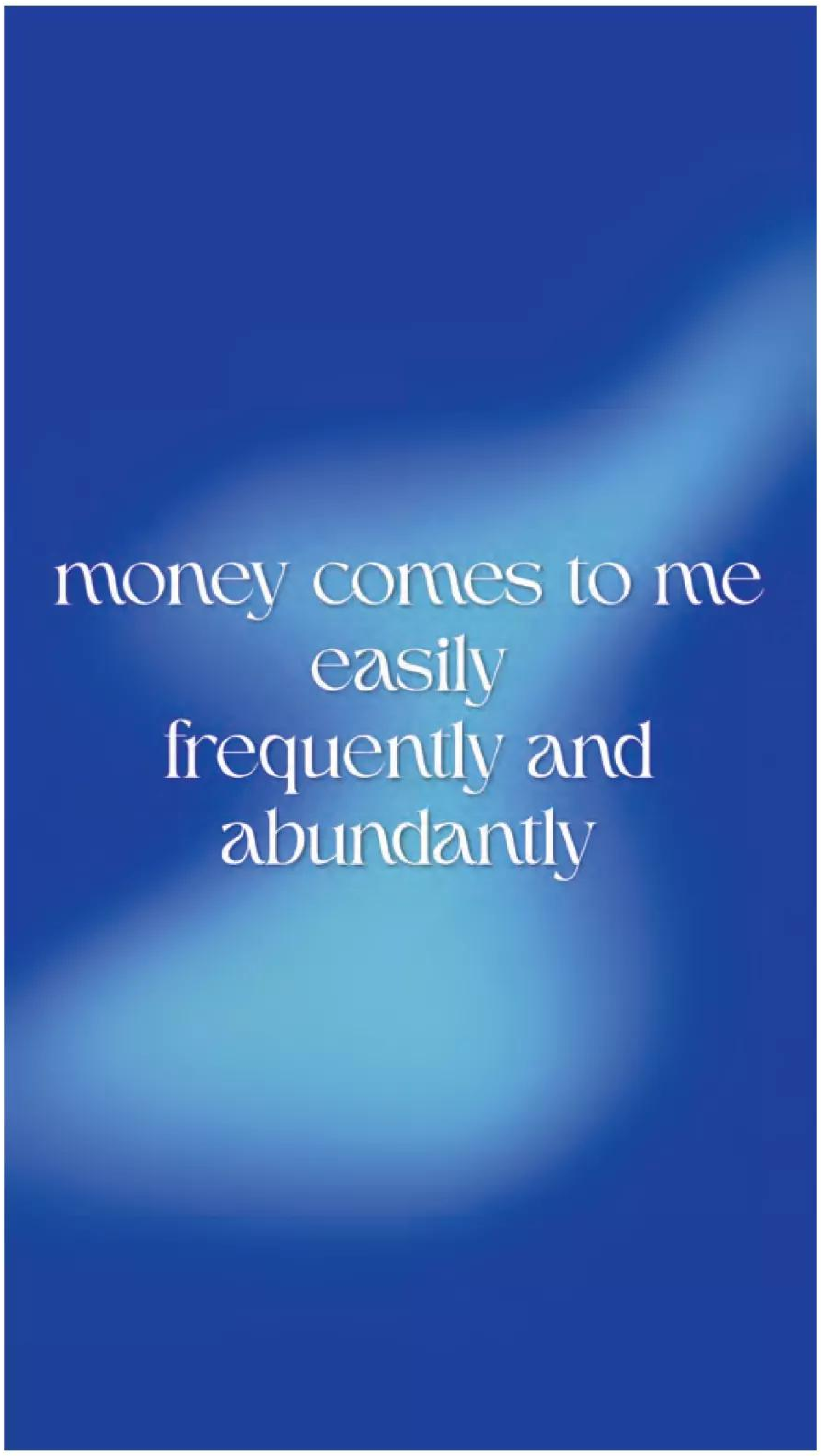
The organiser wrote back within minutes, scandalised: *Do you think I make any money out of my own work?*

Though perhaps I should have, I didn't write back and say: *But I want your work to be paid. Maybe you should stop working for people like you.*

There is a scarcity mindset in the UK, not only of paid but unpaid work, as the hurdles for small arts enterprises to get off the ground are significant. I'm privileged to also be a citizen of Ireland, where arts funding is far from perfect but where asking practitioners to work for free is unusual; while in the UK pay guidelines set out by the Artists' Union of England, AICA UK (who represent curators, critics and scholars) and a 2016 'Paying Artists Guide' by a-n (representing practitioners) – despite the last having been developed in consultation with the sector and Arts Council England, Creative Scotland and Arts Council of Wales – have gone relatively unrecognised by these commissioning bodies.

And yet.

The filmmaker was also right. Much of the most exciting contemporary writing I've read started in those free journals. Many of the most formally innovative writers I know are still working outside the commercial sphere for publishers that can pay only a few hundred quid a book. Getting work paid is only one part of the problem: getting innovative work paid is another. We need a situation both where living wage payments are standard, and where finance is available to support the kind of innovative work that's so often made *only* for free.



Affirmation lockscreen and wallpaper.
Courtesy manifestguide222 / Pinterest

Joanna Walsh is a writer and artist based in Dublin

A Better Tomorrow, 1986, dir John Woo.
Courtesy Cinema City Enterprises / Film Workshop

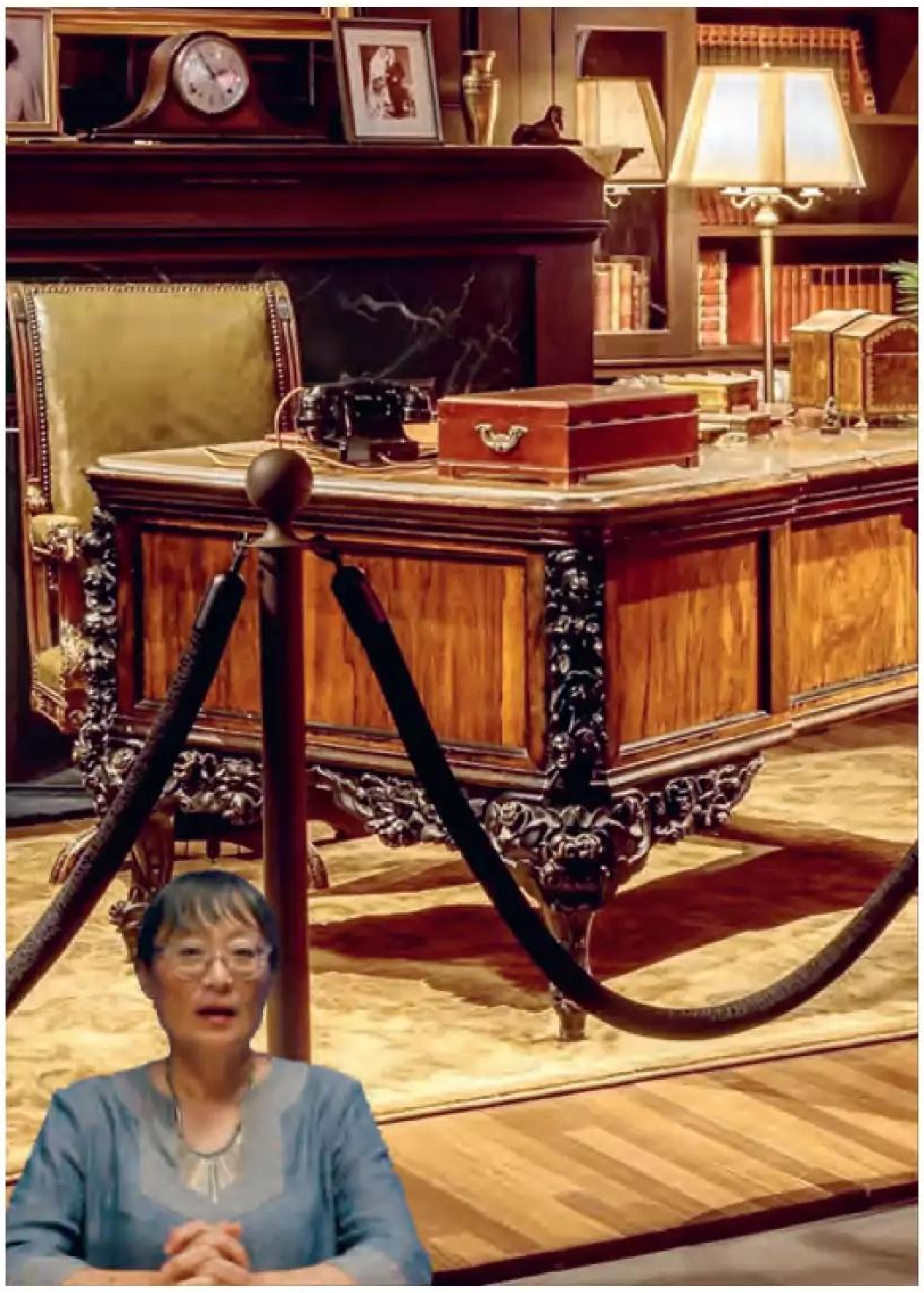
Little Letter Writers

The state of art criticism today resembles a crisis of freedom, writes *Jenny Wu*. One reality has been rejected but another has yet to be conceived

On a drizzly Wednesday evening in August, I joined a queue in front of KGB Bar in the East Village to attend a talk by the cultural theorist and University of California Irvine professor Catherine Liu. The programme, titled 'Gangster Capitalism, Big Bosses, and New Turf Wars in the Class Struggle', arose from Liu's recent work on Hollywood gangster films. Onstage, Liu sat in front of a red curtain and under a disco ball. Across from her was Katherine Krueger of *Current Affairs*, who asked astute questions about *Stagecoach* (1939), *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Scarface* (both 1932 and 1983 versions), and bantered with Liu for roughly an hour before a rapt audience. America, they agreed, has entered a new and unique phase of capitalism. Employers, colluding with private insurance and surveillance tech companies, are increasingly exercising the power of life and death over workers, while the political and economic crimes of those in the highest offices are not only being committed in the open but celebrated by swathes of the population. Under this jerry-rigged system, Liu argued, workers should embrace and organise around the figure of the gangster.

The crowd was full of artists, musicians, writers, actors, creative directors, graduate students, lawyers and community organisers, though the attendee beside me volunteered that they worked for Capital One, which, they noted, provided great corporate membership benefits at MoMA. In our late-capitalist age of perks and precarity, Liu, a vocal opponent of centre progressive politics, has proven adept at capturing a wide array of hearts and minds and spreading her ideas beyond academia. I first encountered the term 'gangster capitalism' on her Substack, where she offers an eponymous course to paid subscribers, with custom-designed merch to boot. At KGB, Liu reiterated many of the points she's made online: white-collar bosses are mob bosses in disguise; workers toiling for wages are "corner boys for the capitalist"; what once may have been called the criminal underworld is now just "reality". Nothing is glamourised in American society as much as ambition, usurpation and betrayal. Predictably, the discussants delighted in mentioning America's "gangster capitalist" president, who recently deployed National Guard troops into US cities over the heads of local government officials, imposed sweeping tariffs on goods from nearly every country to force concessions on trade and other issues, and launched a campaign of extortion and blackmail against universities, museums and media companies. "What is really incredible", Liu said with chagrin, "is you have this gangster in charge, and you know what we're doing? We're writing a lot of letters." Instead of performing shock and outrage "like little prissy *New York Times* writers" or "gather[ing] 250 signatures from professors", mistaking a petition for a show of force, workers who want universal healthcare should, in Liu's words, "grab it out of the hands of private insurance companies".

Liu's disparagement of these 'letter writers' reminded me of another event that took place at KGB back in March. This one, titled 'MANIFESTO!', was a reading hosted by *4Columns* where five art writers recited short criticism-related manifestos presaging some of the political, intellectual and financial frustrations that I would later sense in the air at Liu's talk. It occurred to me that the manifesto, which still carries a strong whiff of twentieth-century European avant-gardism, is another form of letter writing and perhaps one that's no closer than a call to Congress is to praxis. Johanna Fateman, former *New Yorker* columnist and current co-chief art critic for *CULTURED*, pointed out in her reading that the critic nowadays, working in the face of corporate conglomeration and shrinking budgets – in short, under gangster capitalism – is "in the abject position of providing a kind of intellectual decoration, itself threaded through with advertising, for the apparatus of shopping and mass surveillance". "Criticism as a profession", Fateman said, "is likely already unsalvageable, even if we were to agitate for a number of stopgap or transitional measures" such as "a 300 percent word-rate increase in pay for freelance critics or targeted campaigns against our nemeses at the so-called paper of record and legacy magazines". The politically aware, anti-capitalist critic thus is in a bind. Ciarán Finlayson, a writer and managing editor of Blank Forms Editions, argued, "Engaged practitioners and critics are desisting from engaging the artworld as their primary site of political activity, and instead joining political organisations and social movements with strategic leverage, an orientation toward labour and the capacity to challenge state power."



top Still from Catherine Liu's 'Gangster Capitalism' seminar, 2025. Courtesy CLiuAnon.substack.com

above *Scarface*, , 1983, dir Brian De Palma. Courtesy Universal Pictures

A few days after Liu's talk, a classic gangster movie, John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), happened to be screening at the IFC Center in Greenwich Village. In this film, Sung Tse-Ho (Ti Lung), a senior triad member, retires from organised crime when his kid brother joins the Hong Kong police force, but the syndicate, embodied by the boss's righthand man, Shing Dan (Waise Lee), won't let him leave without completing one last job. If Ho takes the job, he endangers his brother, who would be tasked with apprehending him; if Ho refuses, he risks subjecting his friends in the triad to Shing's ire. Although it boasts all the trappings of a Hollywood gangster flick – shootouts, megalomania, burning cash – *A Better Tomorrow* is highly existential. Despite being coerced, Ho conducts himself as if he were radically free, like the student described in Jean-Paul Sartre's 1945 lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism', who is torn between fighting in the Second World War to avenge the death of his brother and staying home to care for his mother. Like Sartre's student, Ho is 'condemned to be free' and must invent his own solution to his problem, one that involves a heist, a hostage exchange and a spectacular shootout, during which he kills Shing with the help of his police-officer brother.

Liu might say that the point here is perfectly straightforward: no matter if one is trying to climb the ranks or get out of the game, as a gangster or an average worker in a capitalist society, the answer is to kill the boss. But *A Better Tomorrow* is a curious case for another reason, in that it's a study of the crisis of freedom, a study of what happens when one all-encompassing way of life has been rejected but another set of conventions and protocols has yet to be conceived. And that is likely where most art critics stand today: having turned away from 'unsalvageable' institutions and mores, we find ourselves radically free – which is to say, rudderless, but also, perhaps, dreaming of the next spectacular revolt.

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Fossils of knowledge installation in Artdegypte, 2022.
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(Detail) Kwesi Botchway, *Messenger of Hope*, 2025, Oil on canvas, 238 × 175 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery 1957.

Art Featured

To know

Controlled Explosion

Lucy Raven captures the undoing and remaking of the American West's landscape, and why the process is both simpler and more complicated than it appears

by Fi Churchman

In stories told along the Klamath River, salmon are not simply a food source but are also considered kin who choose to give themselves to humans. Running from Oregon through Northern California before joining the Pacific, the river once supported some of the richest salmon runs on the West Coast. For the Yurok, Karuk, Hoopa, Shasta, Klamath and Modoc peoples, those fish (the Chinook and coho species) were inseparable from spiritual practice, diet, health, tradition and economy. Their yearly return up the river represents a cycle that binds water, land and people together. The fish are greeted with ceremony, thanked and then mourned when they depart for the sea. To see salmon is to know that lifecycles continue.

When construction of the first hydroelectric dam on the Klamath began in 1903, the cycle was broken. Three more such dams were built on the river's mainstem between then and 1964, resulting in the widescale disruption of the river's natural flow. Concrete walls blocked the fish from reaching their spawning grounds; reservoirs warmed the water, which encouraged the breeding of parasites and sped up the growth of toxic algae blooms; sediment clogged the riverbed. Lower sections of the river gradually became starved of vital nutrients. By the start of this century the once-thriving runs had collapsed: in 2002 tens of thousands of adult Chinook salmon were seen floating dead in the lower river. (The highest estimates put the number at around 70,000.) The loss was ecological, cultural and social. Ceremonies tied to the salmon could not be performed. Food sovereignty was eroded.

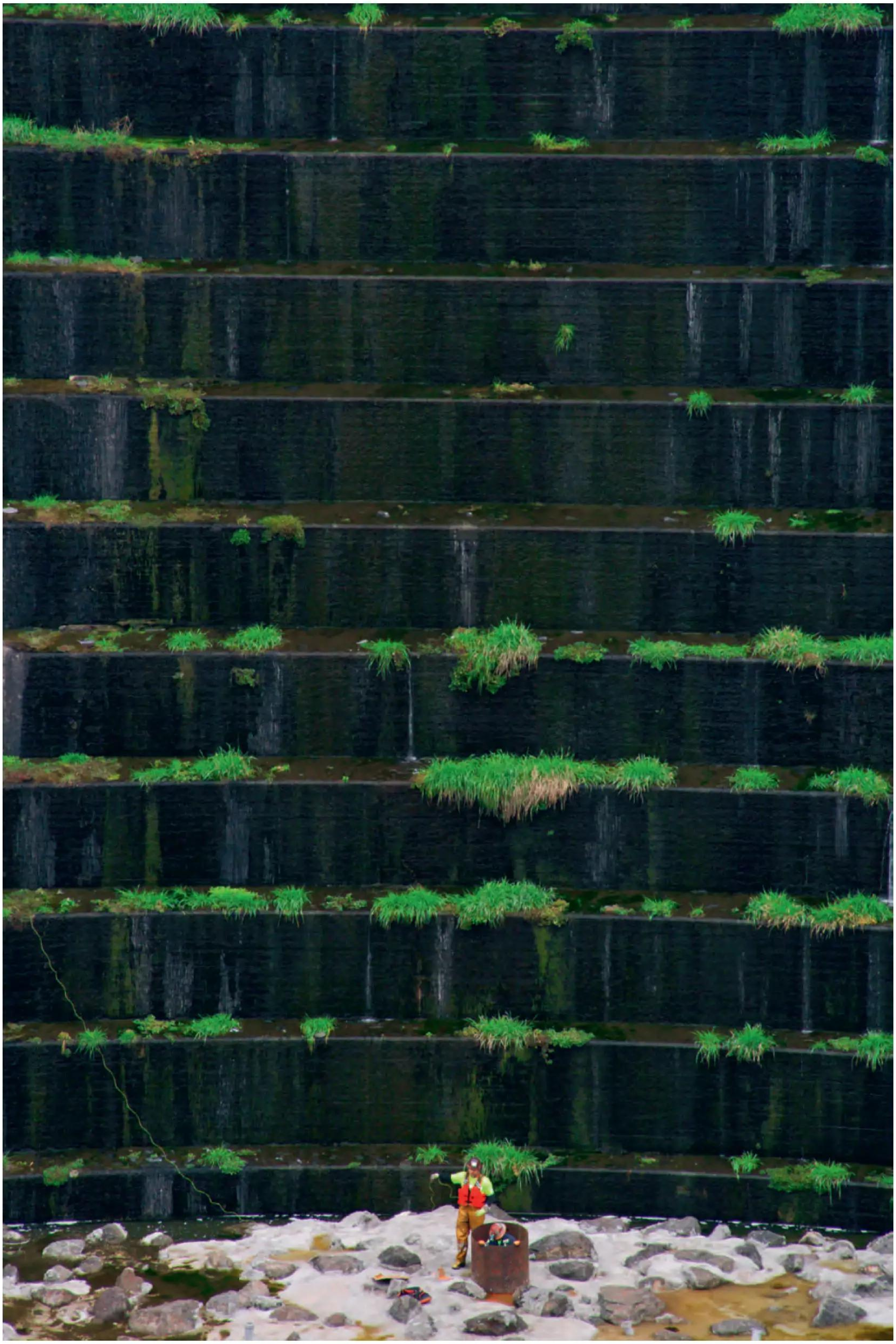
The removal of four dams – J.C. Boyle, Copco 1 and 2, and Iron Gate – was the largest project of its kind in US history. It was completed only in 2024, after decades of campaigning by tribes and environmental groups, lawsuits against the power company PacifiCorp (which owns the four dams) and a long process of negotiation with state and federal agencies. That removal is often framed as an environmental triumph, but it is also, in part, the undoing of an infrastructure built on a logic that finds provenance in the expansionist concept of Manifest Destiny (which, in short, treated First Nations rights as expendable). To some, a river is merely another natural resource to be exploited, diverted for industry, tapped, contained, controlled; for others, the river is part of a symbiotic ecosystem, a giver of life that should be treated with respect.

American artist Lucy Raven produces photography, video, sculpture and installation, often exploring systems of power. Her new videowork, *Murderers Bar* (2025), takes the abovementioned history as its backdrop. The title refers to the nineteenth-century name for Happy Camp, a town on the Klamath, and points directly to the violence of settler expansion: massacres, land seizures, the gold rush. Raven positions the dams within that lineage as a structure that extends a colonial worldview, one in which a river is to be tamed and exploited. But *Murderers Bar* does not explicitly narrate that history, nor does it speak on behalf of those who lived it. Instead it drops viewers into the process of the Copco 1 dam's dismantling, so that the material as much as the conceptual weight of the structure – and of its destruction – becomes the focus.

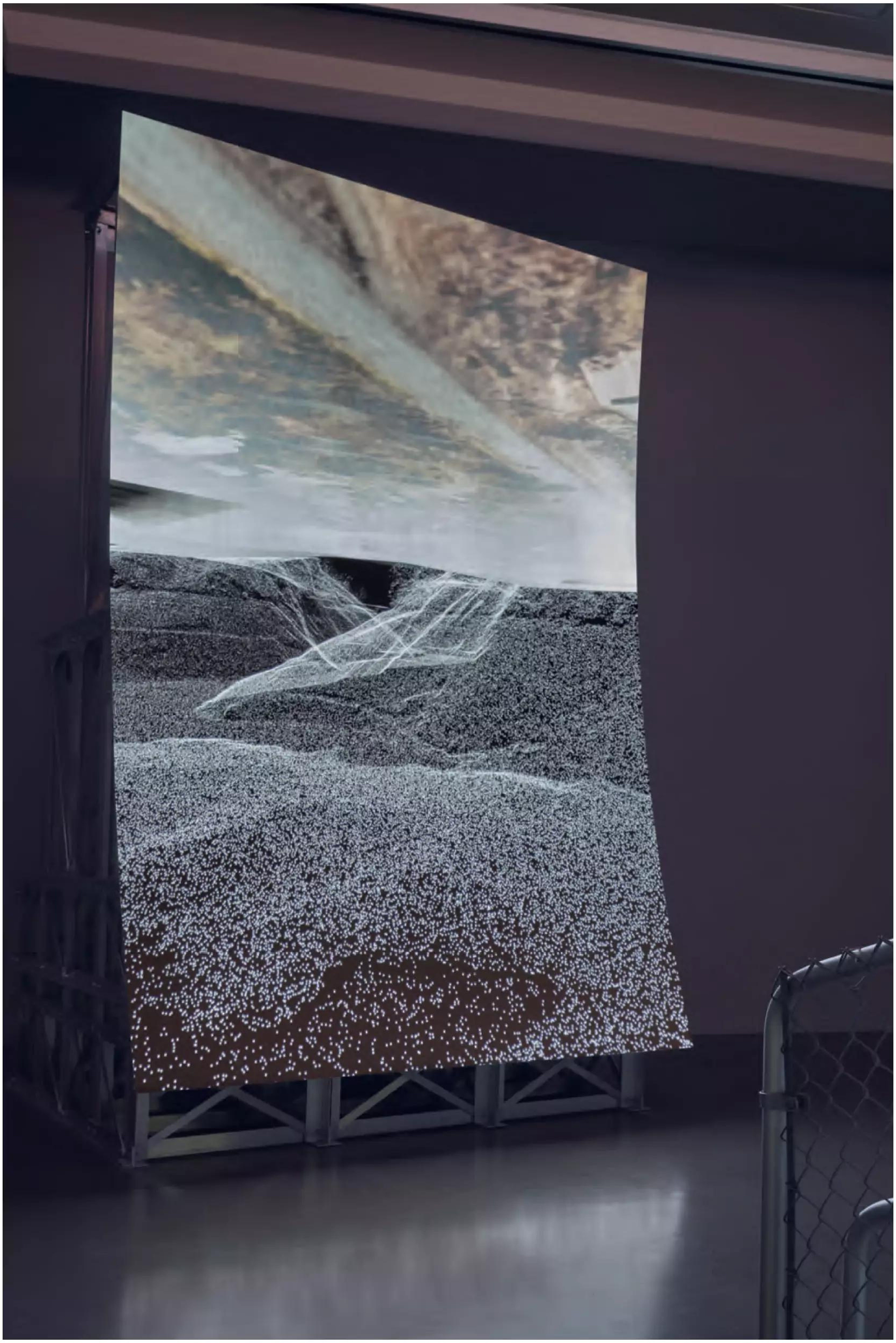
Projected on a freestanding aluminium frame, the 42-minute work immerses the viewer in shifting registers of image and sound. Dipping beneath a digital rendering of a brown body of water in an abstract landscape, viewers are taken on an 'underwater' tour of what appears to be the natural winding path of a riverbed that has been digitally modelled in 3D. (And based on data collected by the Yurok Tribe Fisheries Department.) What is visible above is not the same as what's actually below. As the viewpoint resurfaces, the video switches to real footage of the reservoir trapped behind Copco 1. Vast aerial shots pan the area around the dam, in part rendering it as set of abstract outlines. These sequences, shot from a distance, carry a kind of bureaucratic detachment, evoking the cold gaze of surveyors and regulators. Between these is more straightforward documentarylike footage of workers and machinery: shots of the dam and its surrounding power plant, hard hats and high-vis vests, men drilling holes and shoving

Murderers Bar (still), 2025, video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 41 min 40 sec, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

Murderers Bar (still), 2025, video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 41 min 40 sec, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London



Murderers Bar (still), 2025, video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 41 min 40 sec, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London



Murderers Bar, 2025 (installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery).
Photo: Rachel Topham Photography. © the artist. Courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery

sticks of explosives into the concrete wall of the dam. In one scene, a worker stands at the base of the dam, and the scale of the manmade structure is colossal. *Murderers Bar* reaches its catalyst early on, with an explosion, a release of water through – given the scale and volume of water contained on the other side – what appears to be a too-narrow tunnel. Watching the pressure of the water flow is a visceral experience; it's as if watching oxygen flood the alveoli of a pair of air-starved lungs. That embodied feeling is transmuted via closeup shots that skim the surface of the water, duck beneath and resurface – locating the viewer in the body of a fish. The sensation is of moving with the salmon themselves, catching light in the murky depths of the river, yet disoriented by its unsettled sediment.

> *Murderers Bar* holds the viewer in suspense between ruin and renewal, making palpable how power is built and how it comes apart, leaving uncertainty in its wake

Digital animations intersperse and occasionally overlay the footage: apart from the 3D renderings of the riverbed, a set of radar range rings floats over footage of the river; the movement of its dial gradually turns the footage from colour to black and white. These insertions and the extreme differences in viewpoint mark different ways of 'knowing' a landscape – to live in it, to fight for it, to render it as data, to control it. Raven refuses to reconcile them. Instead she makes the viewer toggle between perspectives: surveyor, salmon, worker and witness. The result is a fractured vision that mirrors the sediments and layered history of the river itself.

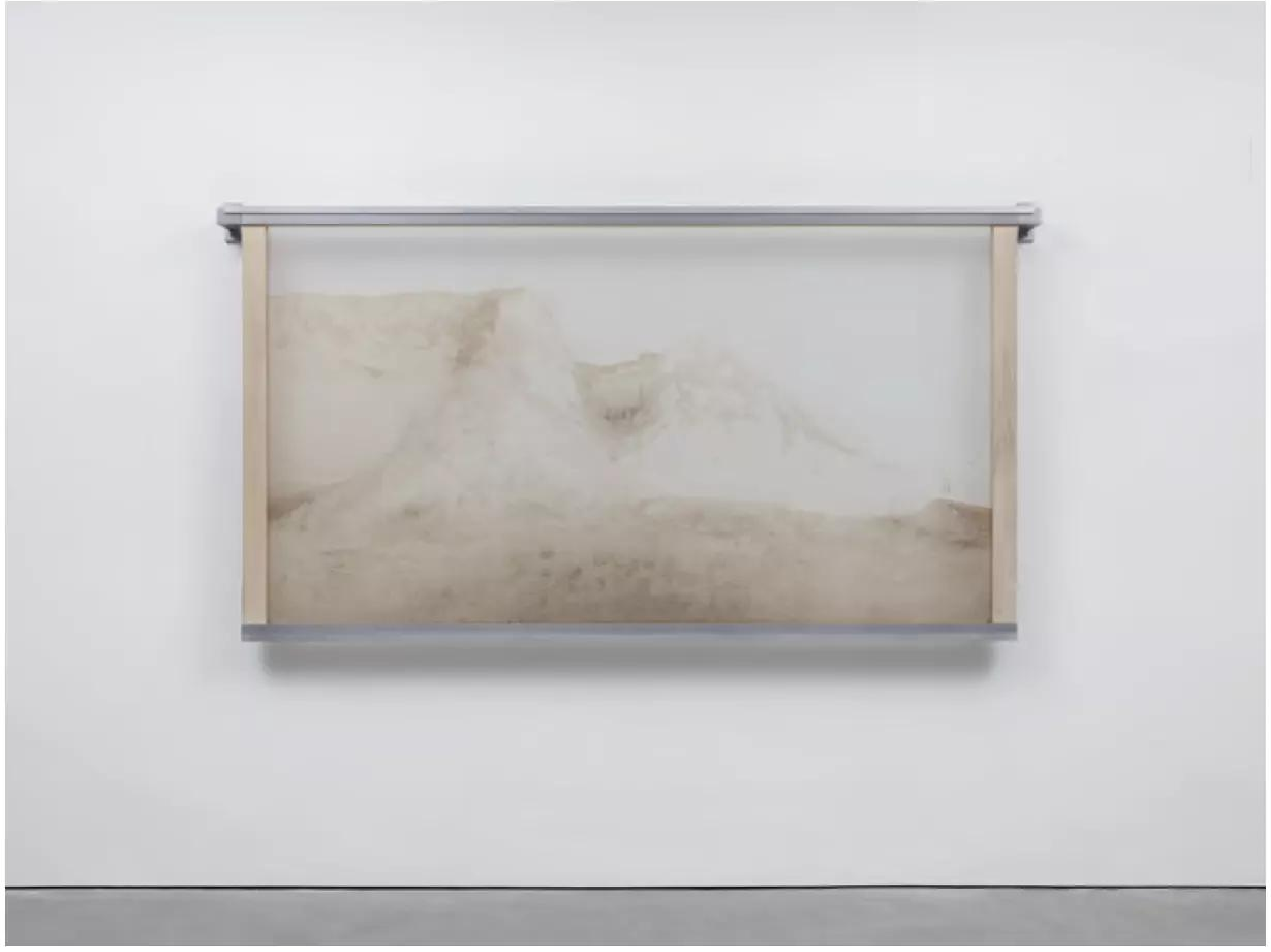
Murderers Bar is the concluding part of Raven's multimedia project *The Drumfire* (2020–25), which reshapes the Western landscape genre. *The Drumfire* does this by focusing on how the landscape's natural materials are placed under pressure, broken apart, reconstituted. In a new documentary about the series and more specifically about the making of *Murderers Bar*, titled *Lucy Raven: Pressure & Release* (2025), the artist describes this as an enquiry into the "kind of state change that creates structural, or in some ways infrastructural, violence on the landscape". *Ready Mix* (2021), the first video in the series, follows the mining of aggregate through to the production of cement at a plant in Idaho, where explosions, grinders and mixers turn rock into the base matter of construction. The two *Demolition of a Wall* films (*Album 1* and *Album 2*, both 2022) use highspeed cameras to record the shockwaves of controlled blasts detonated in the landscape at a military site in New Mexico, while the blast itself is left out of shot.

Sometimes Raven approaches her subject from a more oblique angle: while making *Demolition*, she turned to photography. Her resulting photobook *Socorro!* (2023) is named after the town in which the explosives range is located; meaning 'succour', Socorro was named by sickly Spanish settlers who were provided water by the Piro Native Americans. Raven worked with the ballistics lab at New Mexico Tech to produce shadowgrams of projectiles fired into a sealed chamber – abstract grey images of airflows, inky-looking blooms and grids on photosensitive paper pockmarked with piercings from the impact of the projectiles' contents. The images in *Socorro!* hint at the ongoing

Ready Mix (still), 2021, video, b/w,
quadrophonic sound, 45 min, aluminium and plywood screen,
aluminium seating structure. © the artist.
Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

above *Demolition of a Wall (Album 1)* (still), 2022,
video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 20 min 58 sec, wood and aluminium screen,
aluminium seating structure. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

facing page *Deposition, Dam Breach, 17*, 2024,
sand, dirt, cement, saltwater, silk, wood and aluminium, 141 × 263 cm.
Photo: Mark Waldhauser. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London



violence that's shaped the American West while also recalling the history and use of photography in military science. And then there is *Depositions* (2024), a series of five works on silk Raven made while researching *Murderers Bar*: to create these works she constructed water chambers out of soil and cement, lined them with silk organza, then poured water in and let the water gradually drain away. Sediment shifts across the fabric, leaving behind delicate stains and residues that appear like an abstract landscape. But more literally, they represent the slow inscription of history onto a surface – the way water records both passage and obstruction, the way systems of extraction and containment leave marks, even when the structures themselves are dismantled.

Across these works Raven often uses surveillance cameras, infrared imaging, industrial processes and digital mapping – the very technologies that hide or rationalise systems of control. And in doing so, she lets the strangeness, the distortion and the sensory qualities of these technologies become the texture of the work. Manifest Destiny also maintains a spectral presence throughout the project: the ideology that justified westward expansion, displacement and conquest, written into the dams, mines, military bases and ballistic labs that shape the work.

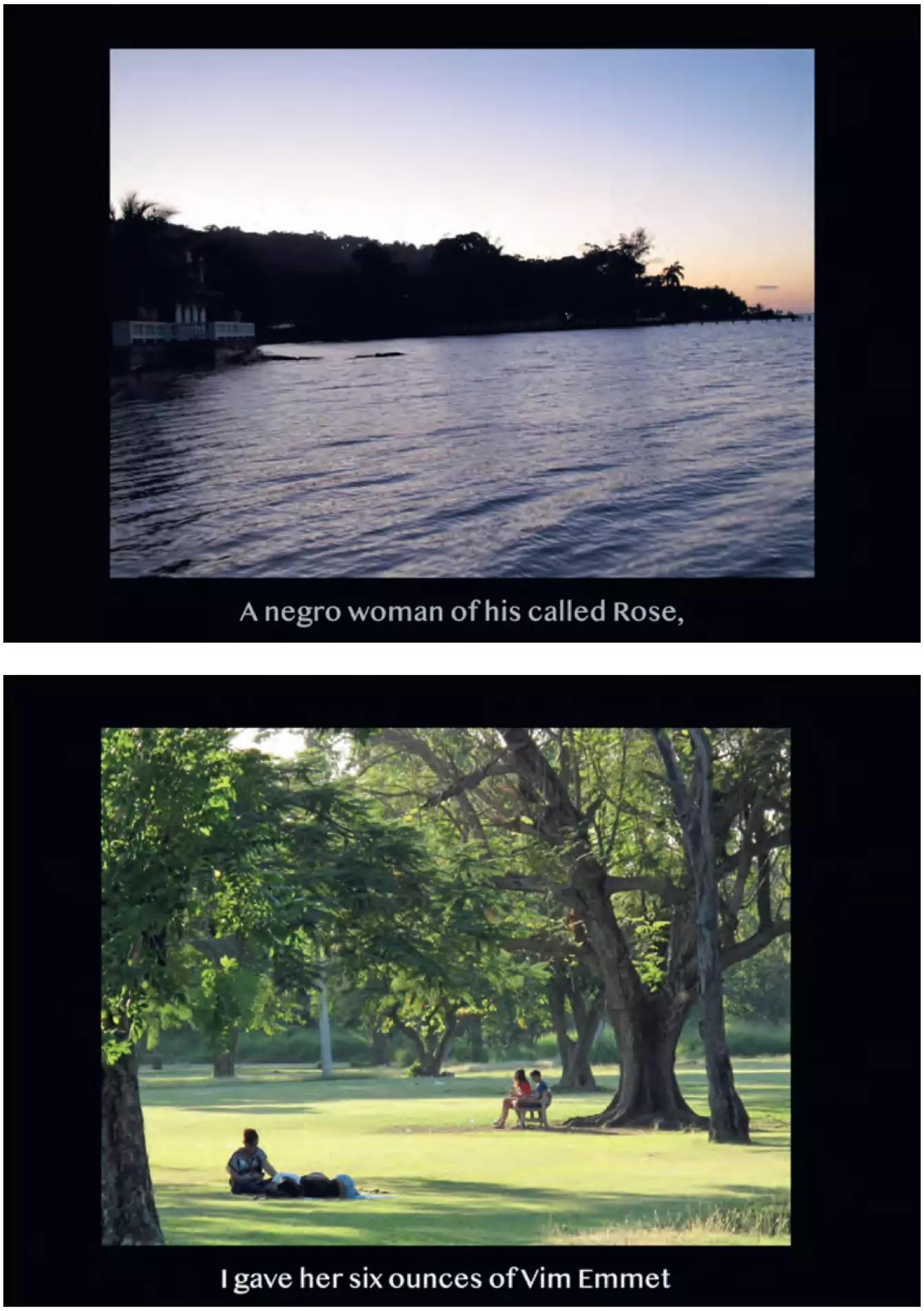
As with the three earlier videoworks in *The Drumfire*, to watch *Murderers Bar* is to move between scales: from the technological distance of the aerial survey, to the embodied perspective of water rushing past, to the brute-force labour of demolition. Each view destabilises the others. Together they produce an image of the river that is unsettled, contradictory, unresolved. That refusal of closure matters, because while the Klamath now runs more freely, its future remains precarious: the release of the reservoirs has revealed altered habitats, and there is lingering contamination from the industrial plants. Restoration does not immediately mean resolution. The power of *Murderers Bar* lies in holding the viewer in suspense between the fractured imagery of ruin and renewal, in making palpable both the violence of infrastructure and the fragility of undoing it, and how power is built and how it comes apart, leaving uncertainty in its wake.

In October 2024, just months after the final reservoir was drained, the first Chinook were spotted moving through stretches of river that had been blocked for a century. Their passage is a sign of recovery, but it is not a clean slate. The land carries indelible damage. The last of Raven's video footage shows the extent of the drowned land behind the dam: its draining reveals the remains of long-submerged trees, vast swathes of silt-clogged land, ancient spawning grounds that need to be revived and an altered landscape that communities who live beside the Klamath must now navigate. *Murderers Bar* holds us in that double vision – the flow of water resumes and salmon are returning to the river, but it's also a reminder that while cycles of life begin again, the scars left behind take longer to heal. **ar**

Murderers Bar *is on show as part of* Lucy Raven: Rounds, *at The Curve in the Barbican, London, 9 October – 4 January. The film will also be on view at The Power Plant, Toronto, 7 November – 22 March; the documentary* Lucy Raven: Pressure & Release *can be watched for free via art21.org*

Joy Gregory & Philip Miller, *Observations: Rose*, 2021

by Tom Denman


A negro woman of his called Rose,
I gave her six ounces of Vim Emmet

Observations: Rose (installation views), 2021,
video, sound, 14 min 50 sec. Courtesy the artists

In Britain, it's stereotypically assumed that the weather is an innocuous topic, free of controversy. Yet, depending on one's circumstances, within its conviviality are less-than-comfortable thoughts and memories. Joy Gregory and composer Philip Miller's 2021 video *Observations: Rose* is a slideshow mostly consisting of photographs of Jamaica's luscious vegetation and the Caribbean Sea, in different states of roughness and calm, with Gregory's close angle and appreciation of the island's temporal variances – beyond the touristic turquoise – emoting familiarity and affection. Grating against these sentiments is a horrific anecdote, narrated via subtitles, linked to the former British colony's slaveholding history. And over these visual and textual components, we hear phone interviews that Gregory has conducted with other Jamaicans, asking them about their experiences of migrating to England or, in some cases, moving back. During one call, Gregory explains that her questions are "about… the weather, really". The way she says it, with that pregnant pause, implies already that the weather encompasses much more than rain or shine.

In her interlocutors' words, the smog and cold of 1950s London turn out to be inseparable from the loneliness and longing, intensified by memories of the warmth of Jamaica – while the blissful contentment of the interviewees who live there now substantiates these memories, as do the beautiful images. Adding to the work's emotional complexity is Miller's cello soundtrack, made up of achingly drawn-out chords – I picture one of the instrument's strings threading errantly through time – which seems to pick up on wounded depths veiled in the candid reminiscing to which it acts as a musical backdrop.

> In registering how history, memory and everyday experience inflect each other in varying, inexact ways, *Observations: Rose* demonstrates how an artwork can be deeply political without being didactic

Over the past 40 years or so, Gregory's go-to mediums have been photography and film, but in this work much of the emotion comes from her presence as a listener – her receptivity as a photographer reemerging in conversation. "So if you close your eyes and think about Jamaica, what do you see?" she asks one woman gently. What's moving about the answers is partly the way the verbal content ("the green grass, the clear sky, the mountains") rhymes with the sensitivity of Gregory's lens to the way light and colour convey morning coolness or the warmth of seawater. But most of all it's in the general feeling of candour, which at times can be traced in the technical glitches (Gregory: "My phone's so quiet…"), although it manifests mostly in vocal intricacies – the vulnerable abandon of speaking about something yearned-for, the stop-start of getting the memory right, the daydream pauses. On the few occasions when the words are muffled, this serves to emphasise the release of feelings – gratitude, joy, sadness, anger – made possible by the trust between speaker and listener, something implicit yet tangible. Empathy here is less based on cognitive understanding than the rawness of speaking and listening, while there may also be something therapeutic, for Gregory's interviewees, in the mental reorientation she encourages.

Gregory's affordance of a sense of self to the people she's speaking to is in stark contrast to the violence of the subtitles, which form the 15-minute video's only linear narrative, a storyline that is at odds with the more haphazard, freer and multiple conversations in the voiceover, looped on a separate, hour-long track that exceeds the duration of one viewing. Told in the third person, the story follows an unnamed man's medical treatment of a 'negro woman of his called Rose' who suffers from 'melancholy'. It's an unnerving, ugly, dissonant account, especially when he scarifies Rose's neck, or when we read that white pustules form on her body, caused, perhaps, by the drugs and other treatments he is forcing on her. Just as disquieting is the distant, monological tone, heightened by the text's slow delivery, often just three words at a time, like administered medicine or some kind of slow torture: she is 'hard, as all mad people are, to work on'. This contrasts with the voiceover, whose freewheeling and dialogical generosity relinquishes much of the artist's authorial control.

The mind's juggling of voice, text and image and its disparate readings of the beautiful Jamaican landscape is suggestive of multiple realities intertwining (perhaps it's more than one string I see in Miller's score). At the end of the sequence, with about three minutes to go, the format of the photographs switches from rectangular to square, the colours faded. The Jamaican overgrowth is replaced by a more trimmed-back beauty, featuring neoclassical follies, a huge, white-ribbed greenhouse and swans – for now we are in London's Kew Gardens, and by the time I clock this the images have jolted to another new format, in high definition and stretching the full width of the screen. The square images are like postcards, England seen from afar and long ago, whereas the widescreen envelops us, the progression reflecting the journeys of people and flora from colony to metropole. The beauty of Jamaica can be joyful and sad at once, a duality reflected at Kew, a colonial edifice where many of the plants that Gregory and her interlocutors remember so fondly can be seen. Although he is – pointedly – unnamed in the work, Gregory tells me that Rose's abuser is based on the seventeenth-century collector of plants Hans Sloane, and that Miller's score adapts an Angolan slave song noted down by a freed Jamaican slave and musician named Baptiste.

Gregory and Miller's great achievement in *Observations: Rose* is its registering of how history, memory and everyday experience inflect each other in varying, inexact ways and degrees, demonstrating how an artwork can be deeply political without being didactic. By not naming Sloane or giving the date or location of the subtitled narrative, and by not revealing the root of the background music, Gregory and Miller detach them from their historical specificity and leave open the extent to which they pervade the images of present-day Jamaica and Kew – and yet they do, in some ways, pervade them, as does the heartwarming voiceover. The sentiments carried in the text and the sound contaminate each other too, as the artists daringly juxtapose two kinds of care, the oppressive and the loving. The weather, something changeable and diffuse, always affecting your mood in ways you can't put your finger on, is an apt metaphor for the indeterminate relationships between past and present, time and place. **ar**

Observations: Rose *will be on show as part of* Joy Gregory: Catching Flies with Honey*, at Whitechapel Gallery, London, 8 October – 1 March*

Tom Denman is a writer based in London

John Smith

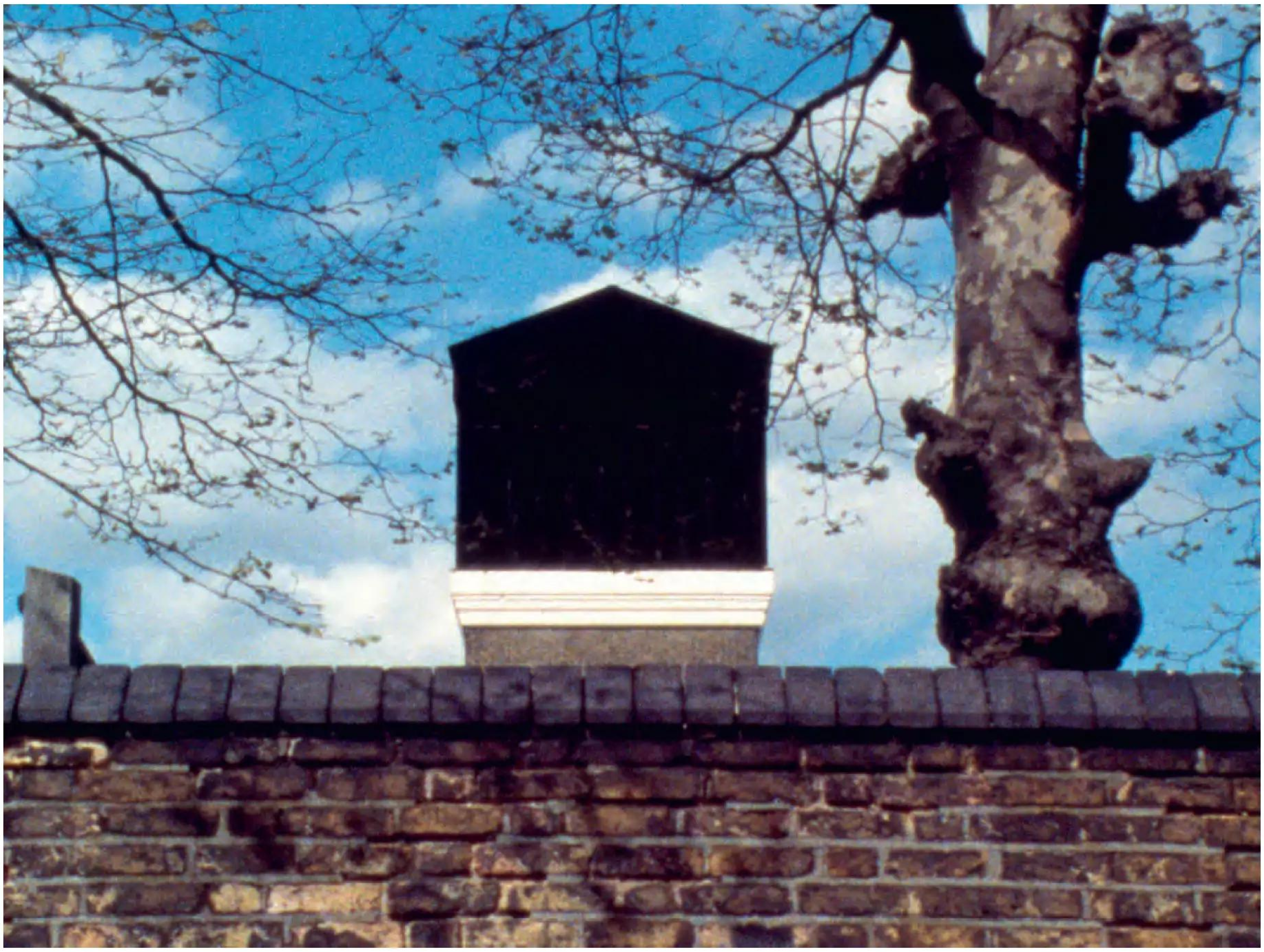
Over the past 50 years the artist has built up a body of work at once disarming and tender; one that, above all else, makes us think about how we see the world and our place within it

by Martin Herbert

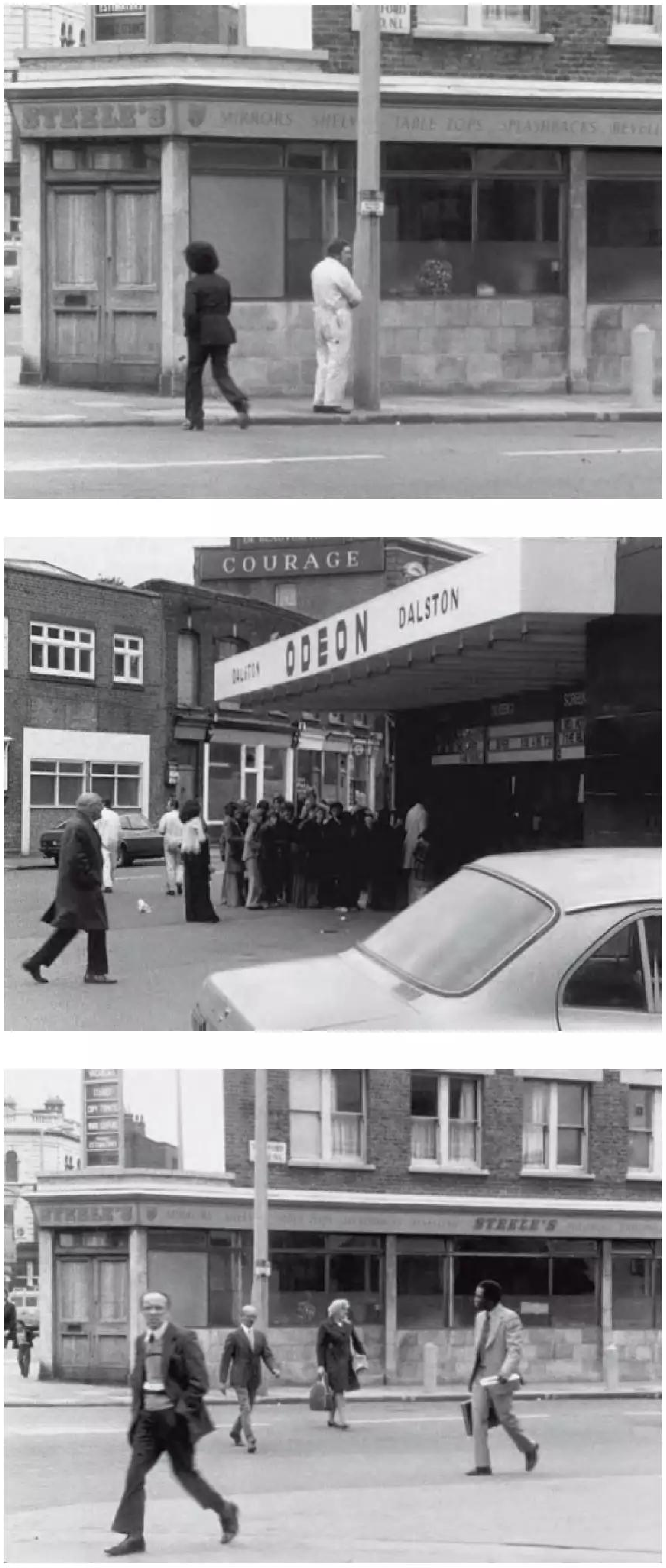
Between 1985 and 1987, John Smith shot the 16mm, 24-minute film *The Black Tower*, a work whose inventiveness, economy and myriad wrongfooting aspects now stand as a microcosm of the British artist/filmmaker's continually self-renewing, half-century career. The narrator of *The Black Tower* – Smith himself, who both scripts and voices virtually all his films – recounts a modern-day gothic horror narrative over fixed-position images, mostly shot outdoors in London. One day he notices the titular edifice, something like a big dark potting shed on top of a tall brick building, looming over a terrace near his home. From then on – spoilers ahead – it follows him wherever he goes: to visit a friend in prison; to the Shropshire countryside for respite from this ominous, pursuant enigma; to hospital after his mental breakdown following a period living indoors and subsisting on ice cream; to the cemetery after he finally, half-involuntarily enters the building and dies, where the story does not, quite, end.

The Black Tower is, in one regard, a postmodernist update on the weird and eerie tales of Victorian-era writers like M.R. James and Arthur Machen. But, typically for Smith, it's also a whole bunch of other things at once, artfully angled together. It's a structuralist film: Smith uses all the different viewpoints that the real tower, thanks to its height, could be seen and filmed from – including a pseudo-rustic view through trees, soundtracked by loud birdsong – to suggest it lurks in numerous places, and the specifics of those places drive the twists of the narrative. Bursts of block colour, which initially recall the disjunctive techniques of Jean-Luc Godard, are later revealed as tight closeups of the narrator's everyday stuff (a mug, a teasmade, a blanket). When Smith's narrator dreams that he's inside the tower, and the screen makes one of its periodic cuts to black, he hazards that the room he's in is both painted black and brightly lit. In a sequence shot through the sequestered narrator's/Smith's window, observing the changing foliage on a prominent tree, cars sometimes drive past its trunk and don't emerge the other side, as if vanishing into an occult abyss. At the film's midpoint, the narrator says he's spending most of his time indoors 'writing this script', which he describes as 'dramatic fiction'.

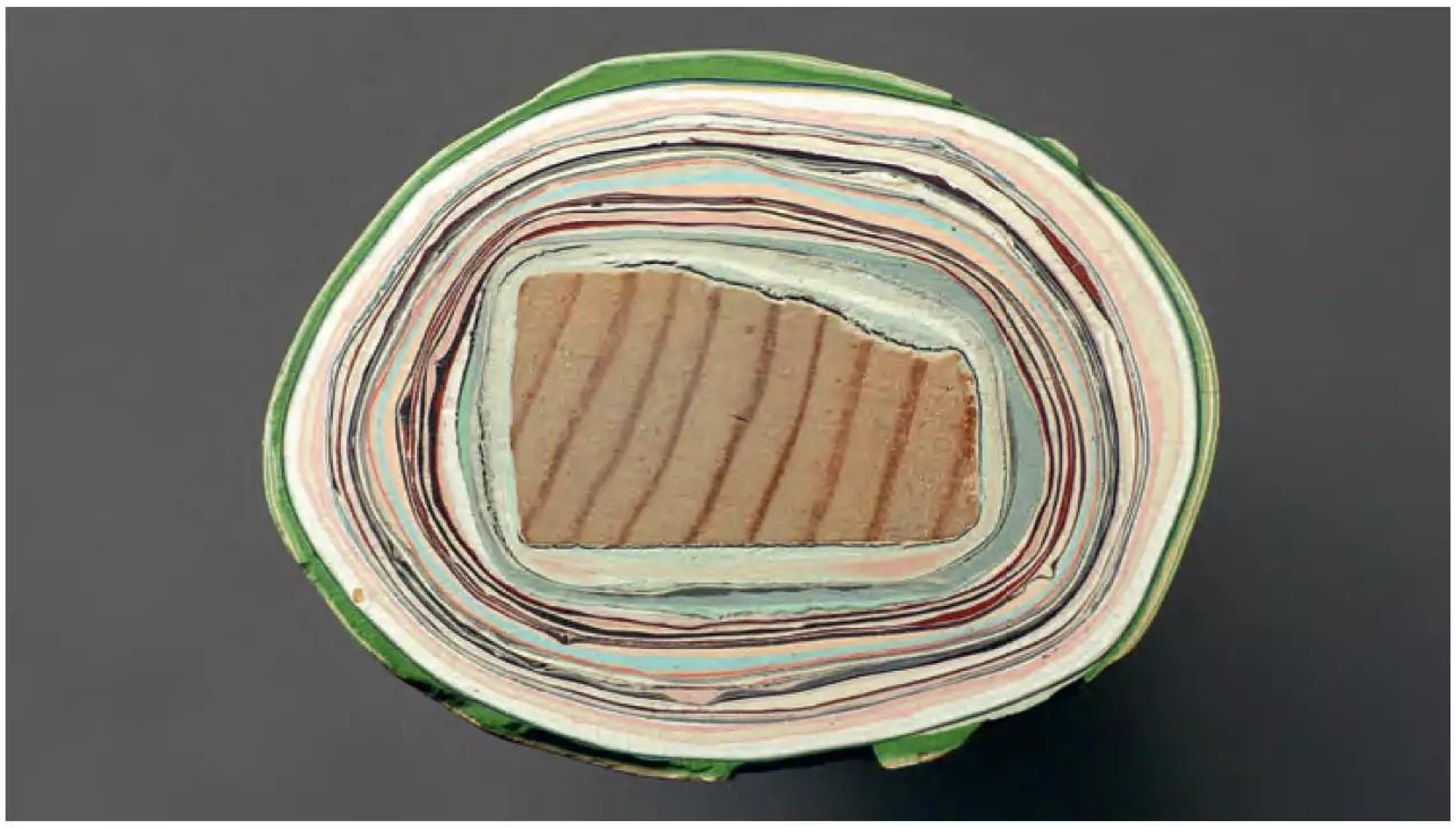
But then, all this play has a political-aesthetic point – that appearances can be deceptive. *The Black Tower* was filmed, notably, in the midst of Margaret Thatcher's reign, when the UK's Conservative government was hiding its cruelties under suggestions that the country was getting back to some kind of sylvan, *Brideshead Revisited*-type golden age (assisted by a popular 1981 TV remake of the novel). As you watch Smith's film, you keep reassessing its aims and scope, a hallmark of the artist, and maybe if you see it repeatedly at intervals of years, it changes again for you. I first watched *The Black Tower* nearly 20 years ago; viewing it again recently, somewhat older – it's currently part of a three-film presentation at Vienna's Secession – made me think



above and facing page *The Black Tower* (stills), 1985–87,
16mm, colour, sound, 24 min


STEELE'S
MIRRORS
TABLE TOPS
SPLASHBACKS
COURAGE
ODEON
DALSTON
DALSTON
STEELE'S

The Girl Chewing Gum (stills), 1976,
16mm, b/w, sound, 12 min



Dad's Stick (still), 2012, HD video, colour, sound, 5 min

about what the inescapable tower actually *is* (if not just a harbinger of someone losing their mind). Depression, à la Winston Churchill's 'black dog'? The inevitability of death? As with the gothic tales that precede it, this film gains from its unexplained aspects, but equally functions as primo deconstruction that jumps the fences of formalism; it's also mordantly funny. This is the kind of thing that Smith is nonpareil at doing, and it's how he makes his implicit sociological points so palatable.

Such was evident as far back as 1976, when, at age twenty-four, while still a student at the Royal College of Art, he made the now-classic black-and-white film *The Girl Chewing Gum*. For this, Smith filmed the goings-on at a street corner in then down-at-heel Dalston, East London: pedestrians, pigeons, passing cars. He then recorded an omnipotent voiceover in which he appeared to be directing this chancy action ("Now I want the old man with white hair and glasses to cross the road. Come on, quickly!" – cue old man). But then, gag established and viewer sucked in, he begins discussing the demographic makeup of the area, immigrant labour and inequality; and, finally, pulls apart the film's illusions a couple more times – 'revealing', for instance, that he is recording his voiceover from a field miles away, and then telling new stories about the people in Dalston, as if to establish that when image and language are put together, narrative and truth become fluid. And yet, within this fluidity and urging that the viewer keep their eyes open, Smith finds truths about society and the deceptive power of media.

> Within this fluidity and urging that the viewer keep their eyes open, Smith finds truths about society and the deceptive power of media

Over the last half-century, he's managed this balance in untold ways, from tracking how communities were being displaced by the wrecker's balls and the imposition of new roads in East London in *Blight* (1994–96) to the seven-part *Hotel Diaries* (2001–07), wherein Smith ruminates, seemingly unscripted, on global strife in and around a series of hotel rooms. These works, which often involve a TV playing stage-managed footage of a current war, seem casual but are actually pointedly choreographed: in *Museum Piece* (2004), shot during US assaults on Falluja, Iraq, Smith, who's been monologuing partly on Second World War history, finds an object made by Siemens, notes the company's Nazi history, leaves his room and enters an elevator made by the Schindler company and thus, yes, "Schindler's Lift". The narrator, and the narration, are unreliable; the viewer is provoked into a useful suspiciousness.

Part of Smith's achievement, though, is to trouble any given reading of his work as merely exploring how words and images can dangerously intersect. His art, in finding the wide potentialities within everyday objects and environments, can be surprisingly tender, if never quite sentimental, and it has ruminated ever more on time passing and mortality. See, for example, *Dad's Stick*, commissioned for the Frieze Art Fair in 2012 (and also in the Secession show). This film, themed around two sticklike objects that Smith appears to have inherited from his accountant father, opens on a wavering, rainbow-coloured, initially incongruous painted landscape of stacked, hilly lines, while Smith talks about his dad, "a perfectionist with a steady hand", who stands for a lost, seemingly more decent age: a man who had two jobs in his life, who kept a cylindrical ruler from his first job and converted it into a truncheon – cue still image of same – in case he ever became a have-a-go hero.

above *Blight* (stills), 1994–96, HD video from 16mm, colour, sound, 14 min

preceding pages *Being John Smith* (still), 2024, HD video, colour & b/w, sound, 27 min. Photo: Tony Smith

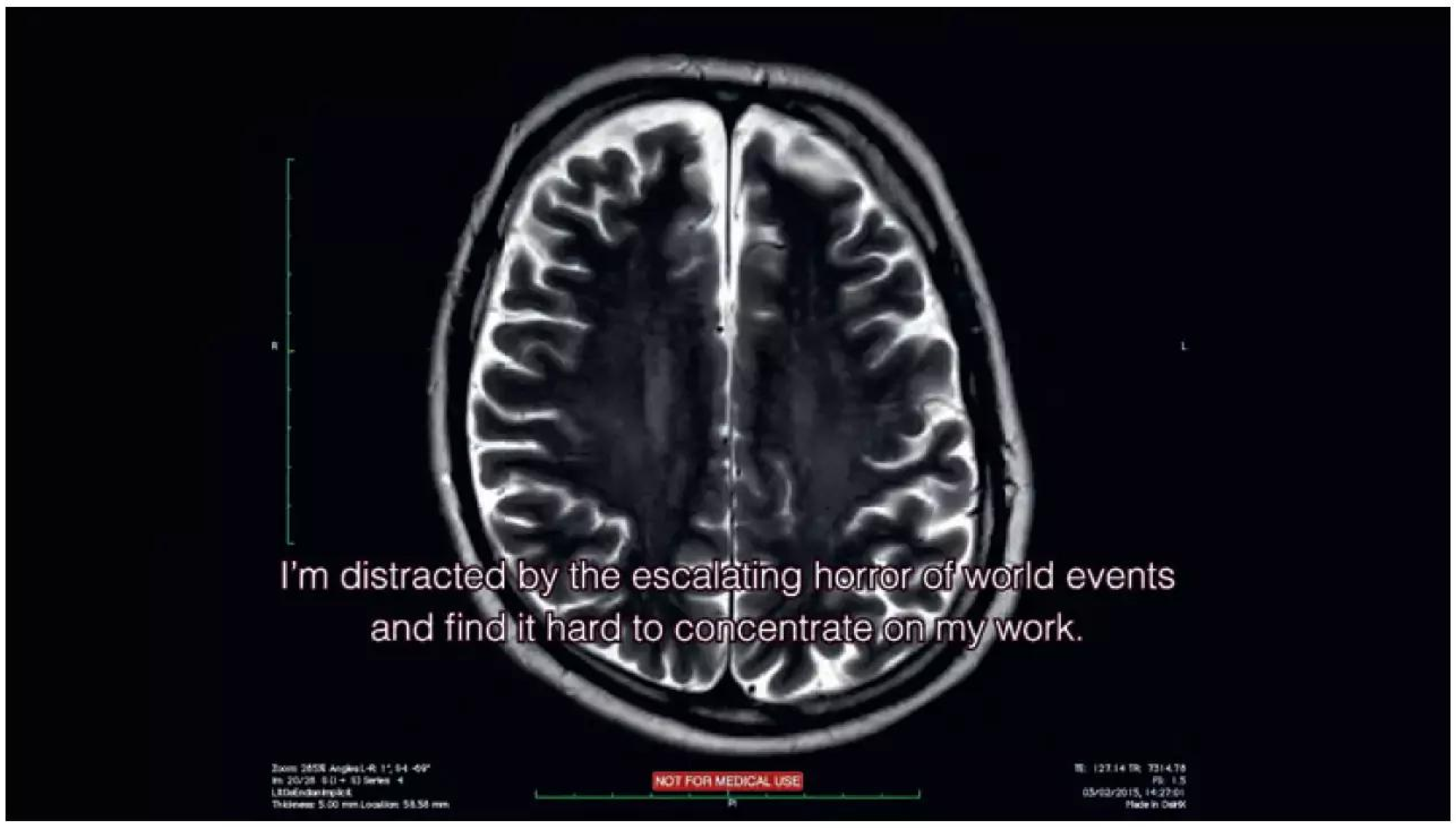
The initial landscape, we realise (or are told), is a cross-section of a stirring stick that Smith Sr used while painting the walls of their various abodes, and that he later cut down so he could see, all at once, his amateur-painter past and his changing colour preferences laid out in rings. This image/object is something like an agate that compresses a past of dependable employment, civic duty and responsible homemaking, if not a romanticised past (Smith's father beat him sometimes, the son remembers, but not often and not with the truncheon). The closing credits establish that Smith's father died in 2007. You assume the son is telling the truth here; but it's Smith, so you can't be entirely sure; you're moved but watchful. All this – a suburban emotional rollercoaster, a story both personal and generational – is dispatched within five minutes.

And yet in some ways this seems like a mere runup for the complexly autobiographical *Being John Smith* (2024), the third film in Smith's Secession presentation. This 27-minute work, with voiceover by the artist as usual, begins as if it's going to be an oddly conventional, autumnal trawl through Smith's own life and how his colourless name has shaped it, mixing family photos, school reports, pictures of a long-haired Smith at college, etc. But a few minutes in, it shifts tone via captions, first talking about how Smith has grown more leftist as he's gotten older (followed by 'Stop the genocide. Ceasefire now'), then probing his own anxieties and opening up about health issues: the artist, we learn, is uncertain of his thinking processes following treatment for "head and neck cancer" three years earlier; this is his first work since. He's also distracted by "the escalating horror of world events", predicts that "the human race will soon be extinct", wonders accordingly why artists are increasingly making archives for posterity since "cockroaches can't read" and says he lacks confidence in making art now, doesn't like hearing his voice.

Amid this, while pulling the film in two directions, he nevertheless continues narrating his own life and addresses how "being called John Smith still undermines my sense of individuality and self-worth"; he's not even, he notes, the most famous and google-able John Smith involved in film – that'd be a character from Disney's *Pocahontas*. (The wit is undimmed, though: Smith points out that an upside of his moniker is that when he has to fill out digital signatures online, his name is usually already there.) The film ends, comic-redemptively and via an anecdote about Smith having taught Jarvis Cocker at Saint Martin's, with Smith in a VIP box (which reminds him of the Black Tower) at a Pulp concert, thousands of people singing "I wanna live with common people like you", and the artist pointing out that there are currently 30,000 John Smiths in the UK. But it's the one and only John Smith, filmmaker, making this film – which has been periodically, self-mockingly intercut with the sound of a wailing baby – so the last thing he notes is that he's "not sure what I think about this ending".

It's an extraordinary work, further proof of Smith's abilities to wring diverse feeling-tones – like whatever you'd call the combination of certitude and doubt – from the 'ordinary', illuminating the depths behind the ostensibly humdrum. The film plays games but is, simultaneously and wrenchingly, done with playing games; and it confirms once again that this man's name is the only ordinary thing about him and the arc of his creative life. "I've come to accept", says the then seventy-one-year-old Smith early in the film, "that I might have made my best work before I was seventy." *Being John Smith* begs, in the strongest terms, to differ. **ar**

John Smith: Being John Smith *is on view at Secession, Vienna, through 16 November*

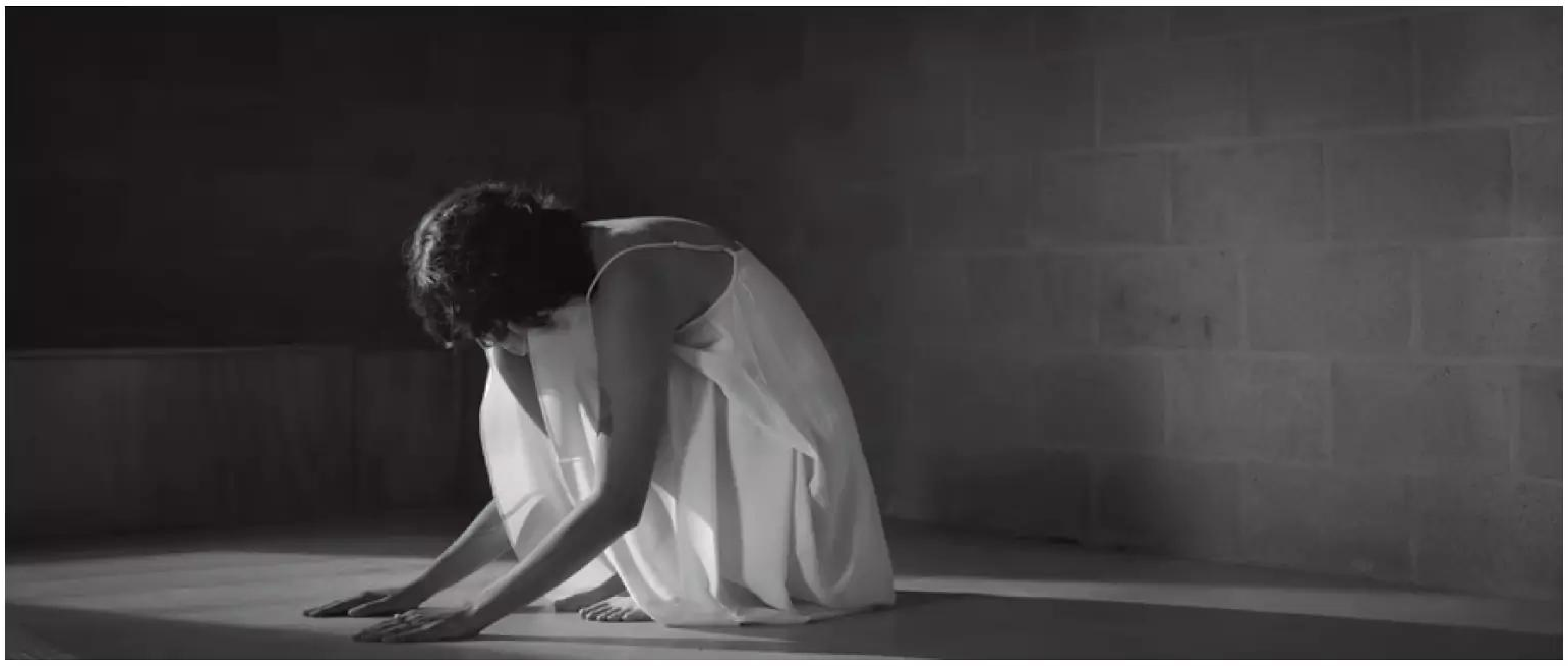

R
L
I'm distracted by the escalating horror of world events
and find it hard to concentrate on my work.
NOT FOR MEDICAL USE

Being John Smith (still), 2024, HD video, colour & b/w, sound, 27 min

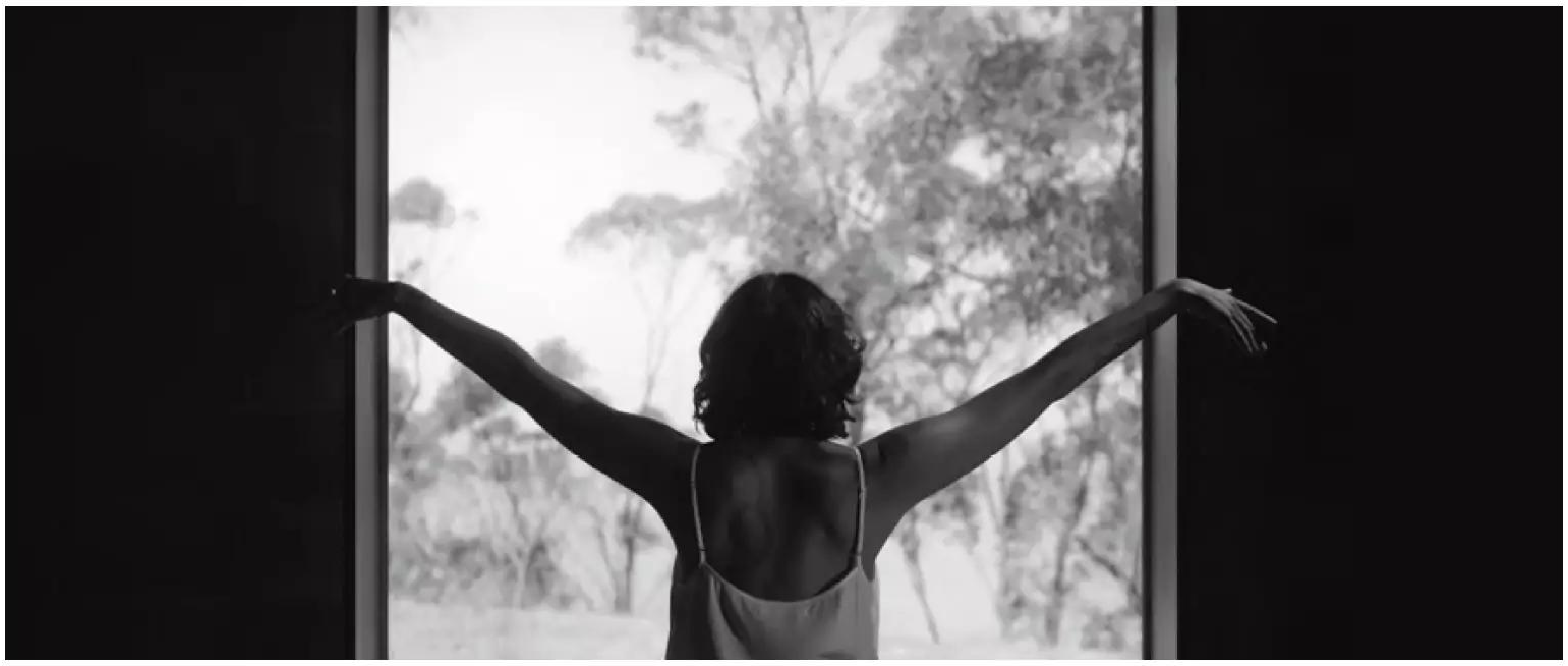
all images Courtesy the artist

The Everywhen

by Mikala Tai



Timings and tropes of horror film open a portal to *Eternity* in the work of Hayley Millar Baker



Eternity the Butterfly (stills), 2025, single-channel film, 12 min 3 sec

The Umbra (still) 2023,
single-channel film, 6 min 24 sec

Imagine the sound that opens the threshold between the living and the spirit worlds; it might be a low, earthy, guttural vibration, as if drawn from the depths of the universe. A sound that enters and inhabits your body, reverberating through your bones, awakening you to the rhythmic pulse of your own blood. A few weeks ago, in a dimly lit exhibition space, I heard this sound. It assaulted me as I walked through a veillike curtain, and it was emerging from a luminous female figure on a vast screen. This central figure of the film *Eternity the Butterfly* (2025) seems to belong to another world; she moves slowly, carefully, and she is uncompromising with her averted gaze – as if refusing to acknowledge the viewer. The scale of Eternity (if we are to understand this is her name) lends to her a kind of omnipresence; she appears all-knowing and all-powerful.

Artist Hayley Millar Baker, a lens-based artist, first came to prominence with her cinematic black-and-white photographic series (including *A Series of Unwarranted Events*, 2018, a set of four photocollages, each alluding to a violent episode in the Gunditjmara people's story during the invasion and colonisation of their Country) that draw on both personal and collective memory to reassert First Nations sovereignty. Since her inclusion in the 4th National Indigenous Art Triennial in 2022 at the National Gallery of Australia, Baker has become known for her moving-image practice and, as demonstrated by *Eternity the Butterfly*, her ability to stretch time into a taut, anticipatory experience. Belonging to the Gunditjmara, Djabwurrung and Nira-Bulok Taungurung peoples through her maternal lineage, and of Anglo-Indian and Portuguese-Brazilian ancestry on her paternal side, Baker grounds her artistic practice in her ancestral connections. She approaches her work as a form of cultural maintenance, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty and wisdom remain current, accessible and alive.

In *Eternity the Butterfly*, the everyday potency of female Indigenous interconnectedness takes a powerful, contemporary form. The work unfolds through two viewpoints inside a cinder block home that flicker back and forth: from one perspective, a fixed partial view of an empty room; from the other, a view of Eternity, the lithe, luminous female figure, who somehow appears both earthly and ethereal, light and dreamlike. In the first few flickers between viewpoints, I notice little: Eternity makes clear, deliberate stretching movements in front of a large window, while in the stark room a formation of small rocks appear in a line on the floor. Gradually, Eternity's movements begin to interlink, a rhythmic pace emerging, and with each shift of viewpoint the rocks seem to grow; first slowly, as though summoned by her all-encompassing, guttural vibration, then transforming into black fabric forms and eventually swelling into looming dark monuments.

The monuments expand and solidify as Eternity breathes meditatively; sometimes in long, slow intakes, at other times in short, staccato pants. Rhythmically mirroring these breaths is a soundscape of birdsong. At first, only the sounds of a few softly heard native birds emerge, gradually building into the full cacophony of the bush in the heat of summer at dusk. It's as if Eternity is conducting them with her breath, both the monuments and the birdsong, folding them into one another, interdependent and interconnected, with each intake. As the sonic swell builds, Eternity begins to chew ochre, masticating it into a paste and breaking the soundscape's crescendo with a final expectoration – a spray of white ochre paste over the black monuments. This ceremonial eruption of pigment silences the birdsong and gives voice to the monuments: as though enlivened by the ochre, their hurried, indecipherable whispers rise in volume until Eternity, with a single sharp exhale, topples them all.

Eternity the Butterfly is the third in Baker's ongoing series of moving-image works, each a chronicle of a contemporary Indigenous haunting. Like its predecessors, *Nyctinasty* (2021) and *The Umbra* (2023),

Eternity the Butterfly (stills), 2025, single-channel film, 12 min 3 sec

Eternity the Butterfly acts as a kind of visual threshold to the ever-present spiritual world of Aboriginal cosmology, here rendered in tonal black, white and grey. Anchored by the familiar tension-driven rhythm of the horror genre, Baker uses pace in all three films to build a sense of disquiet: lingering shots breed unease, slowly building towards a threshold, before arriving at a sudden, shocking cut that dissolves the veil between the living and the spirits. Through this deft control of time, she asserts the presence of the spirit world just beyond reach, giving it form for a fleeting, unsettling moment.

> Baker cultivates a lingering sense of unsettlement, using this sense of uncertainty to draw viewers into the liminal space between the known and the always-known, where Aboriginal knowledge unfolds as relational and generational

Eternity inhabits a refined architectural mise-en-scène, echoing the worlds of *Nyctinasty* and *The Umbra*, in which those central female characters also dwell within spaces of elite modernist architecture. In Baker's work, the contemporary Indigenous female body serves as a conduit of everyday ceremony, allowing otherworldly experiences to flow through ordinary moments. All three films centre on female First Nations protagonists who present as an embodiment of their ancestral spirits and whose internal stillness renders every action assured and deliberate as they move within these studied interiors. While Baker draws on cinematic traditions of the horror genre to build unease and anticipation for the viewer, the protagonists, in contrast, appear indifferent, as if performing the mundane. Their actions read as routine; their ability to summon and move between time and realities seems entirely ordinary. In *Nyctinasty*, Baker is the protagonist who, through the menial tasks of her evening routine, gives form to the unseen spiritual presences that surround her. In *The Umbra*, a storm raging outside the windows of the house acts as a visual device that dissolves the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds, allowing two young First Nations women to meet across mirrored realities. While we, as viewers, are surprised by the collapse of the veil between the two worlds, the protagonists appear confidently expectant of this outcome.

These women are in command. And these tightly curated domestic spaces are under their dominion. They govern the threshold between the material reality before us and the spiritual realm. Anchored by ancestral knowledge and emboldened by trust in the cyclical nature of life, death and transformation, the protagonists invite the audience to teeter with them as they guide a convergence of realities. Baker cultivates a lingering sense of unsettlement, using this sense of uncertainty to draw viewers into the liminal space between the known and the always-known, where Aboriginal knowledge unfolds as relational and generational. And as the titles of the three films suggest, Baker's works illuminate First Nations stories and histories that were once concealed – hidden in the shadows of the past – and allow audiences to encounter their spectral and enduring presence. In *Eternity the Butterfly* the ever-present spirits are given corporeal forms that are brought into being by Eternity herself. Her breath, her movement, her voice traverse time and space, breaking the veil between here and the Everywhen – a First Nations philosophy that the past, present and future are always in simultaneous occurrence and in continuous dialogue. **ar**

Nyctinasty, The Umbra *and* Eternity the Butterfly *are on view in* The Veil*, Buxton Contemporary, Melbourne, through 1 November*

Mikala Tai is a writer and curator based in Sydney

Nyctinasty (still), 2021, single-channel film, 7 min 30 sec

all images Courtesy the artist and Buxton Contemporary, Melbourne

Thelma Golden

Interview by Jenny Wu

Before Thelma Golden became the Studio Museum in Harlem's director and chief curator, she organised the 1993 Whitney Biennial, a politically conscious and ethnically diverse exhibition that was unafraid to, as *The New York Times* put it, 'stick its neck out'. Works included metal admission pins that read, 'I can't imagine ever wanting to be white' (by Daniel J Martinez). A year later, Golden was back with the 1994–95 group exhibition *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, which provoked the ire of yet more critics but moved the needle on the discourse of Black postmodernism.

Half a decade later, having joined the Studio Museum in its J. Max Bond Jr-designed building – a retrofitted bank located at 144 West 125th Street – Golden curated a group show titled *Freestyle* (2001), which included 28 early-career Black artists, including Mark Bradford and Rashid Johnson, who embodied what she termed a 'post-Black' sensibility: they sought to do something with their work other than represent Black culture – in short, to redefine the very notion of Blackness.

While her curatorial approach opened the floodgates for a generation of Black artists to just be themselves, Golden, for her part, has been happily shouldering the weight of an esteemed, longstanding and fundamentally mission-driven art institution for 25 years and counting. Helming the Studio Museum as it enters a new era in an Adjaye Associates-designed edifice – built, following a $300 million capital campaign, where the humble bank once stood – Golden is poised to steer its legacy through the tumult presently facing arts institutions across the US.

ARTREVIEW *The artist Tom Lloyd, who was the first resident selected for the Studio Museum's influential Studio Program, will be the subject of one of the first exhibitions in the new building. Back in the 1960s, amid the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, Lloyd was making large, abstract aluminium sculptures using multicoloured lightbulbs. This was a time when Black artists were expected to make figurative art. In what ways does returning to Lloyd's work in this moment feel meaningful to you?*

THELMA GOLDEN Tom Lloyd lived so significantly in the story of the Studio Museum in Harlem, because when we were founded in 1968 – and we opened in September of 1968, at 2033 Fifth Avenue, which was the museum's original space – the inaugural Studio Museum exhibition [*Electronic Refractions II*, 1968] was a survey of Lloyd's work. At that moment, this was an incredibly exciting and innovative possibility. Lloyd was an artist working with light, working with technology. He was someone invested in the experimentation of that era.

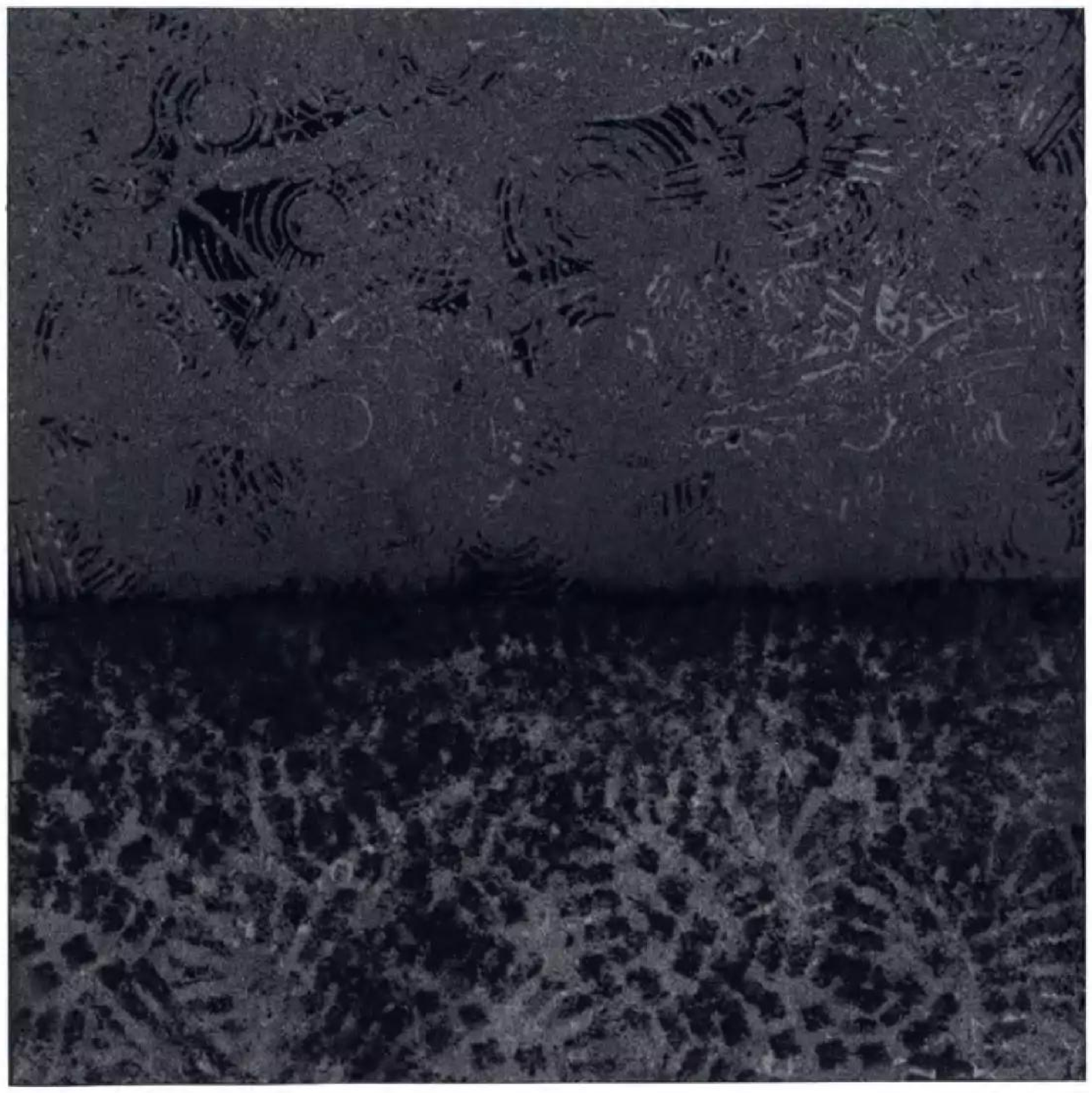
The Studio Museum is an institution that at its founding had committed itself not only to steward the history of Black artists but also to work deeply in the present, supporting the work of Black artists. Lloyd was, at that time, opening new forms and thinking about new forms. Although his work has been included in several important exhibitions – *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964–1980* [2006] at the Studio Museum, *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* [2017] at the Tate – his work has not been seen enough, since the time of that inaugural exhibition. To actually claim fully his legacy and be able to show all that he did is important to us as a way to open the building and open this new chapter of the Studio Museum.

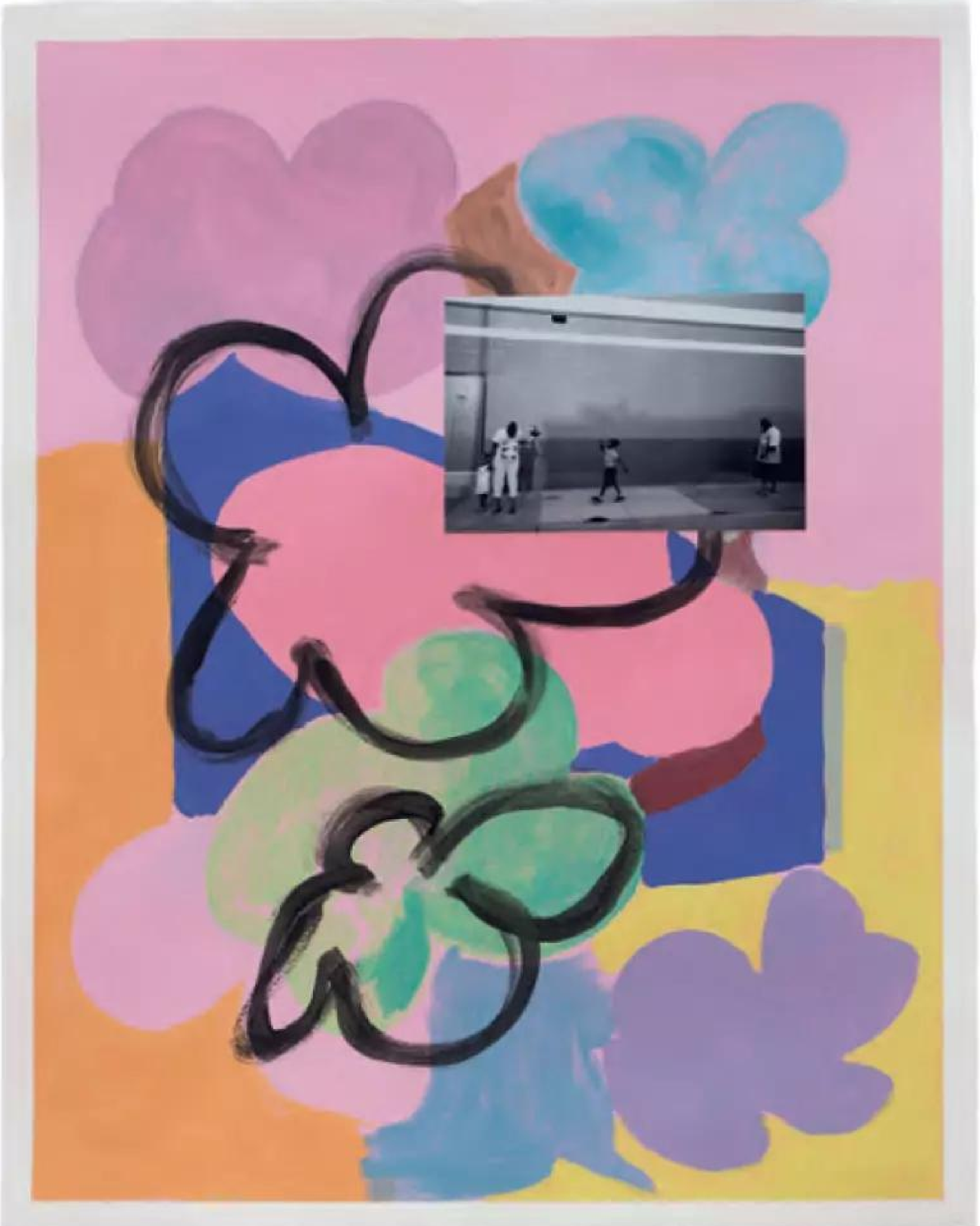
AR *How have the priorities and responsibilities of the museum evolved since its founding?*

TG I often say that our founders gave us the gift of clarity of mission in our name. The 'studio' in our name comes from the fact that, since the founding of the museum, we have had an artist residency programme, where every year we've hosted three artists who have received a financial stipend and 24-hour access to a studio in the museum building. Also in our name is 'museum'. In the late 60s, in many places, and in many

above Tom Lloyd and apprentices, including his son Omar, in the artist's studio in Jamaica, Queens, c. 1968. Photo: Reginald McGhee

facing page Thelma Golden. Photo: Julie Skarratt





top Nari Ward, *Land/Air, Study 20/20*, 2025, copper sheet, asphalt paint and crushed glass, 51 × 51 × 1 cm. Photo: John Berens. © the artist

above EJ Hill, *polychrome (gait)*, 2025, acrylic and archival photograph on paper, 51 × 41 cm. Photo: John Berens. © the artist ways, there was a thought about redefinition of museums: what they should be, where they should be, what physical shape they could take. This is the moment where we begin to get what we understand to be the alternatives to a historic museum structure. So by naming the Studio Museum 'museum', our founders were claiming that word, but with the idea of the museum being in their hands, as something that they wanted to redefine. And then, of course, the 'Harlem' in our name was about siting us in Harlem, geographically but also intellectually and spiritually. The Studio Museum's priorities and mission were made manifest, in those words. That has only continued to deepen over the years.

AR *It's funny that you mention a push to redefine the role of the museum in the 60s, since many of us today are also questioning the ways museums function – socially, politically, locally and globally. A lot has changed in the US since the Studio Museum went under construction eight years ago, but I wonder if a lot of what's happening today in museums – and to museums – may be less unprecedented than it feels.*

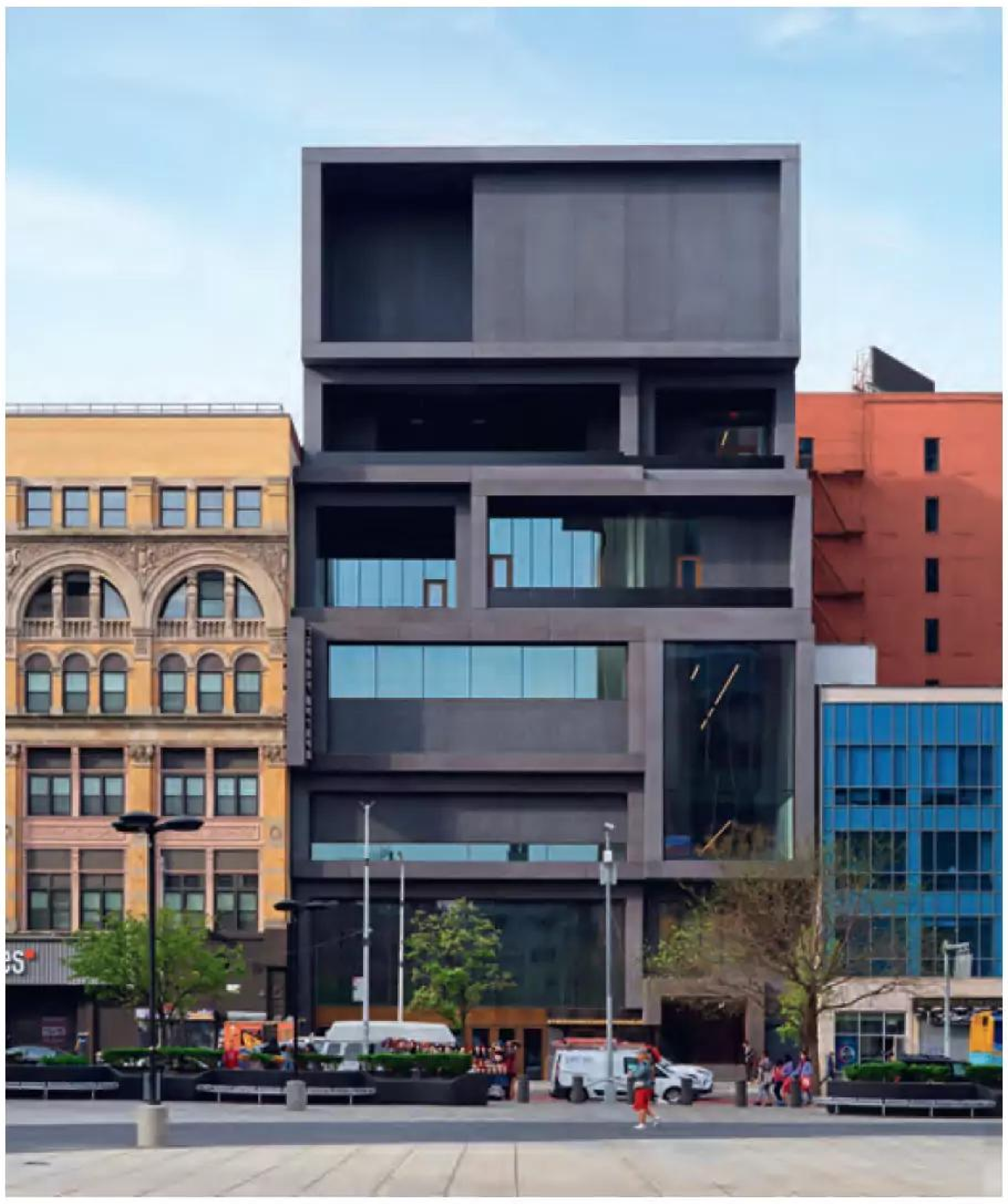
TG The museum being closed for eight years has given me a chance to invest deeply in our past and our history, and what we understand are the cycles of history. Our founders, our inaugural director [Charles E. Inniss], the curators and educators were working in [19]68 in a moment that is very much like the one we're in now. Museums remain important civic institutions for the discourse of ideas. They are a critical part of our larger civic dialogue.

AR *Thinking about how the physical architecture of museums are often used to signal power, and the layout of galleries inside a museum is often hierarchically designed, can you speak a bit about the floorplan of the new building? How are the various floors organised, and how will they be utilised?*

TG This design of the building was really meant to serve our ambitions and aspirations as an institution. All of the galleries are designed to accommodate all of our exhibition programmes. The gallery spaces sometimes will have our collection, sometimes will present changing exhibitions; most often there will be a combination of the two. There are ways the galleries could be combined to encompass one exhibition throughout the building. For the opening we will have a presentation of our collection, and it will be installed in that way to allow for intergenerational, cross-media dialogues that will allow visitors to see the depth and the breadth of the museum's collection. Our institution has from its founding been deeply invested in having exhibition-making and our collection be part of a larger dialogue about opening the canon and showing, in complex and nuanced ways, the contributions of artists of African descent through the centuries.

AR *How does it feel now that the museum is finally reopening?*

TG We've been closed – not planned – for a long time. When we started this project, we imagined a shorter period of closure and opening, and the many things in the world that happened have made this a longer process. While we were closed, we did not stop programming, because we had an incredible partnership with the Museum of Modern Art, which allowed us to continue to work with artists in our artists-in-residence programme, and then create a new series of exhibitions for MoMA's Project Space. And so our first was in 2019, when they reopened their expansion, and that was Michael Armitage. Then we were able to present the works of Kahlil Robert Irving, Garrett Bradley, Ming Smith and Tadáskía over these intervening years. Those programmes allowed us to continue to be in the world, making exhibitions.



The Studio Museum in Harlem's
new building, designed by Adjaye Associates.
Photo: Dror Baldinger, FAIA

all images Courtesy Studio Museum in Harlem

AR *Many people pictured you as the next MoMA director. Was this something you considered?*

TG This is my 25th year at the Studio Museum. I began my career as an intern at the Studio Museum. I have been associated with the Studio Museum since I was nineteen years old, and it's a museum that has inspired me, educated me and changed me in profound ways. My commitment is and has been to this institution, but I've been privileged to have the opportunity to work with other institutions. I am on the board of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and that has given me an opportunity to understand other kinds of museums. I am on the board of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, so through that I get the chance to experience the incredible work of all kinds of arts institutions around this country. I feel like the question of what I will do next isn't really the question, because what I will do next is what I am doing right now. My work has always been defined by the present.

AR *What do you think is the biggest challenge for museums today?*

TG To create experiences that allow many different audiences to engage with our institutions. As someone who's grown up in museums, I have only ever worked in museums, and my desire to work in museums began when I was a very young person, a high school student here in New York City. I have watched the ways in which museums have transformed to speak to many different groups of people in many ways. The polyvocalness of institutions is what makes it possible for museums to continually evolve.

AR *Do you sense any burgeoning trends or sensibilities among emerging artists today, anything comparable to the tidal shift you articulated when you coined the term 'post-Black'?*

TG I don't know if I could define any trends or sensibilities. What I am seeing, what I continue to see, is artists providing us with an important opportunity to see and think through their work. And I feel like, in the world we're living in, it is an incredible gift to have the opportunity to be able to imagine a future. And that's what art can and does often allow us: the space where we can bring the questions that define how we understand ourselves, the world and each other into a context that gives us a sense of real possibility and, I might even say, power. **ar**

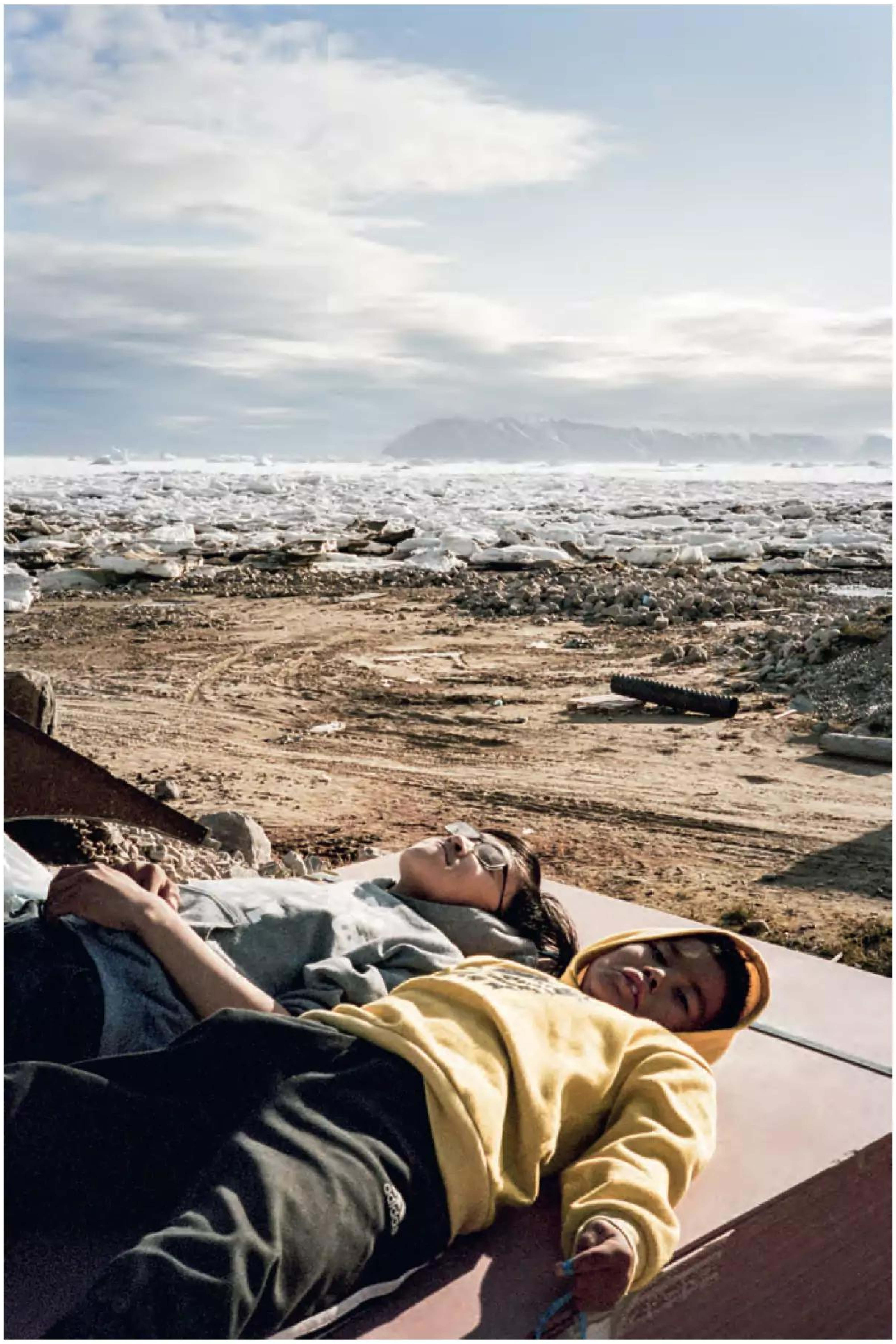
The Studio Museum in Harlem reopens on 15 November

The Celestial and the Profane

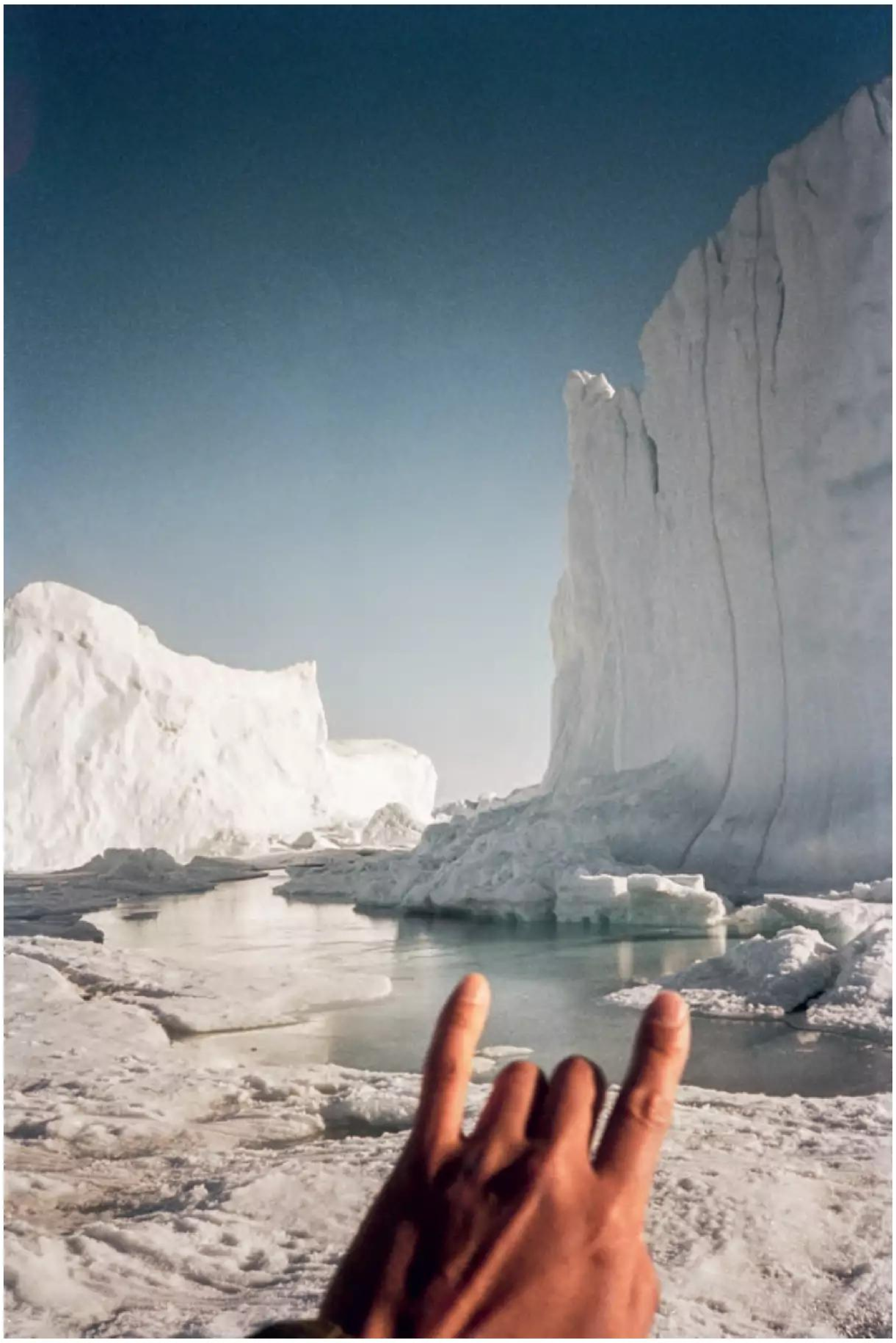
Why Greenlandic artist Inuuteq Storch thinks photography is uniquely suited to telling the story of his homeland

by Alice Godwin

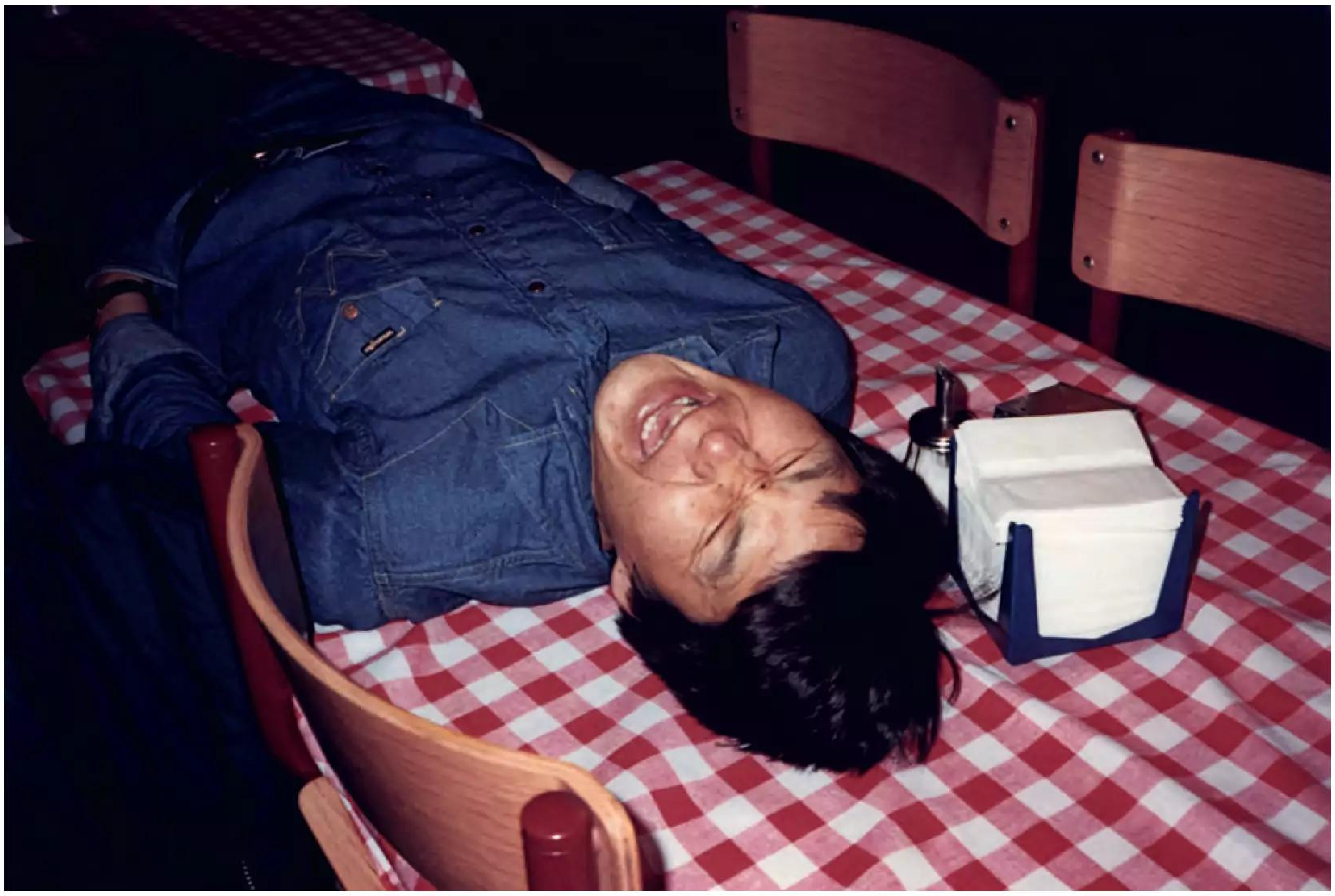
From the series *Keepers of the Ocean*, 2019,
photograph. © the artist



From the series *Soon Will Summer Be Over*, 2023,
photograph. © the artist.



From the series *Soon Will Summer Be Over*, 2023,
photograph, 165 × 110 cm



From the series, *Porcelain Souls*, 2018,
photograph. © the artist

From the series *Keepers of the Ocean*, 2019,
photograph, 57 × 85 cm. © the artist

A few years after graduating from the International Center of Photography on New York's Lower East Side in 2016, Inuuteq Storch published a series of images that had been made using a pink plastic analogue-camera once owned by his sister. *Flesh* (2019) speaks to the photographer's yearning for his homeland of Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland in English). He'd previously studied at the Fatamorgana photography school in Copenhagen; in New York Storch felt newly rootless. *Flesh* captures this particular moment, when Storch was searching for the familiar in unfamiliar surroundings, through snapshots of subway benches, Christmas decorations, stray cats and jocular friends. While homesick, Storch was also enjoying the distance that brought his cultural identity into focus, alongside a desire to photograph Kalaallit Nunaat. "It was a dream come true to move to a city like that as a young man," says Storch – who's now in his mid-thirties and lives back in Kalaallit Nunaat – over email. "Another realisation you get [is] the importance of home. I love New York, but I love it more for letting me realise that we belong at home."

From the seires *Soon Will Summer Be Over*, 2023, photograph. © the artist

The place that home has in Storch's heart is at the forefront of his first exhibition in New York, at MOMA PS1 this autumn. *Soon Will Summer Be Over* will survey the past ten years of Storch's output, filled with nostalgia and warmth for the lives of the Kalaallit, which register here as disarmingly ordinary. "I don't know if my work has evolved, what if it has devolved?" wonders Storch. (His materials, at least, have changed somewhat: these days Storch uses three different cameras – an old Zeiss Ikon for black-and-white 120 film, and two others for 35mm colour and 120 positive film.) Beyond being documentary in nature, these images are deeply personal – we have the feeling that Storch knows the people and places depicted intimately. And wants the viewer to feel just as at home as he does. "I'm from a small community in a quite different part of this planet," he explains. "I hope people can see how diverse this planet is."

The exhibition title mirrors that of a 2023 series taken in Qaanaaq, one of the most northerly settlements of Kalaallit Nunaat and one of the last to be colonised by Denmark. It's a place where the sun shines nearly 24 hours per day in the summer. Framed by the otherworldly Greenlandic scenery, the mundane moments of kids riding their bikes or neighbours sharing a cigarette deny any instinct to 'other' Kalaallit Nunaat; instead it comes across as a vibrant living, breathing place, imbued with beauty and banality. This is also a curious moment of reflection for the photographer, whose reputation has soared in recent years thanks to his representation of Denmark at the Venice Biennale in 2024. There, Storch's presentation *Rise of the Sunken Sun* made him not only the first photographer and youngest artist to represent the Kingdom of Denmark, but the first Greenlandic artist too. The display of several hundred photographs brought to light stories of both individuals and communities, and their connection to the wild landscape.

Storch's burgeoning reputation reflects a growing interest in Greenlandic artists among the Danish cultural establishment, alongside such names as Pia Arke and Jessie Kleemann, spurred by the wider artworld's recognition of Indigenous and minority voices as well as a global push towards decolonisation. Storch, though, seems unaware of his newfound position. Certainly, when he was asked to take on the Danish Pavilion, he did not grasp the importance of the Venice Biennale. At the time, he admitted that he did not attend that many exhibitions or consider himself much of an art expert. Similarly, when it comes to his first solo show in New York, Storch is still not sure what it means to him. He notes, "Life is kind of funny in a way that you actually understand things later on."

He has been purposeful, nevertheless, in establishing the foundations of a Greenlandic photographic culture, through his own work and by collating the work of others, both known and anonymous, historic and contemporary. *Rise of the Sunken Sun* notably included archival images by the first professional Greenlandic photographer, John Møller; the latter documented foreigners who found themselves in Kalaallit Nunaat between the 1880s and 1930s. Storch stumbled on Møller's photographs quite by accident in the Greenland National Museum and Archives. (He's previously explained that he began to make use of archives after a fortuitous night spent dumpster-diving in his hometown of Sisimiut, where he discovered rolls of films.) In a 2025 exhibition in the foyer of *Politiken*'s headquarters in Copenhagen, Storch created an installation of archival photographs from the Danish newspaper that depicted Kalaallit Nunaat, inviting visitors to ruminate on how the country has been represented by outsiders through history. Spanning 100 years of photojournalism, these blown-up images from newspaper clippings offered a vision of the Kalaallit from the wide-eyed view of the press.

Storch's perspective is, of course, altogether different. The series *Keepers of the Ocean* (2019) pictures Sisimiut, in the central west of the country, home to some 5,500 people and the artist's father's patisserie.

The untamed vistas of sea and ice mingle with details of friends, family and daily existence: a young woman tugs the lead of a Qimmeq sledging dog; a cigarette-toting teenager leans out of a yellow Cadillac; washing is pegged out to dry overlooking a dramatic coastline and abutted by a motorcycle. Here, Storch's honest portrayals dispel mythologies surrounding the world's largest island and permit a deeper understanding of individuals on their own terms. We are almost given permission to forget what we think we know about Greenland – such as its supposed primitivism and isolation from the outside world.

Kalaallit Nunaat was a Danish colony between 1814 and 1953, before it was recognised as its own self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. The Danes have been forced to reckon with the legacy of their colonialism in recent years, following mounting political pressure. There are dark moments they would sooner forget, such as the placing of Greenlandic children with Danish families through the 1950s and the forced sterilisation of women in an effort to reduce the population during the 1960s and 70s – an act the Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen apologised for last August. The Greenlandic school system now employs the Danish model, and shamans have been replaced with Christian priests. Storch's first photobook, *Porcelain Souls* (2018), collated photographs taken, and letters written, by his parents when they were young, between the late 1960s and early 80s. The series captures a fairly ordinary coming-of-age story, but one set against an extraordinary backdrop. Handling these images, Storch recalls, he felt that everything might soon fall apart and the traditional way of Greenlandic life disappear.

From the series *Necromancer*, 2023, photograph, 60 × 40 cm

all images Courtesy the artist and Wilson Saplana Gallery, Copenhagen

Storch has suggested in the past that photography is a medium invented by the West, an idea which Greenlanders have adopted. This form of storytelling is, nevertheless, a natural fit with the Greenlandic sensibility and creative instinct, as it is through stories rather than written histories that the Kalaallit have documented knowledge. Storch also appreciates the wordless nature of photography, making it readable to everyone without explanation.

For Storch, the Danes opened a door to European thinking, while the Greenlandic people gave the Danes access to the spirits. "I have noticed that Inuit are very spiritual, and I believe we used to live with spiritual beings not so long ago, and therefore we are still quite connected," Storch explains. The haunting photobook *Necromancer* (2024), made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic in Greenland, reflects on this innate connection between the celestial and profane. In Greenlandic belief, souls can linger and still be reached even after death. In contrast to other series, these grainy images of Kalaallit Nunaat are imbued with an eerie atmosphere – intimate and mournful – as cars journey through snowfalls, boats are abandoned and the shadow of a solitary figure is projected onto the landscape.

Storch's photographs reveal how long-held traditions have become intertwined with European modernity. In *At Home We Belong* (2010–15), Storch reflects on the openness of Kalaallit Nunaat to the outside world, importing the majority of their day-to-day materials and exporting fairly little in exchange. In these intense black-and-white images, the details of clothes, industrial equipment, pipelines and even bicycles refer primarily to imported goods. There's a surrealness to, say, a fisherman pulling in his catch while wearing an American-style baseball cap, or a blindfolded, gun-toting woman on the side of a road, dressed as a dominatrix.

Greenland's trove of natural resources and strategic Arctic position have, of course, become the subject of international debate in recent years. The Trump administration has not ruled out plans to annex Greenland after the Danish government rebuffed offers to buy the island. It's hard to separate an exhibition of Storch's photography in New York from these mounting tensions. For Storch's part, he does not see his work as explicitly political – his images are far more personal. "Photos are maps of my mind and emotions," Storch explains, a format or process he dubs "Identityography". "I find it strange", he adds, "how 'feelingful' [photography] is, even though it's such a mechanical form for expressing yourself." And yet, Storch can understand why his images might *become* political. For they inevitably reflect the shifting effects of outside influence, not least by potential colonisers and climate change.

Storch evidently feels uncomfortable talking on the subject. Instead, he speaks in more spiritual terms: "I have a feeling about this universe that its nature is to change – and, because of that, everything is made to change with time," he says. "Even time changes, depending on where you are. I also wonder how my work might change with time. Let's see." **ar**

Inuuteq Storch: Soon Will Summer Be Over *is on view at MoMA PS1, New York, 9 October – 23 February*

Alice Godwin is a writer based in Copenhagen

Eternal Returns

7

H. P. Lovecraft on the call of the weird

These days, it's hard to swim a few strokes without hearing about the rise of the unfathomable darkness that will swallow the earth – no, not Labubu or the latest TikTok Dance Challenge, but the tentacled cosmic god Cthulhu, high priest of the Great Old Ones, who lies dormant in the ancient (made-up) city of R'Iyeh, sunken beneath the waves of the Pacific Ocean. First featured in American writer H. P. Lovecraft's 1928 short story 'The Call of Cthulhu', the ur-creature has become shorthand for the spectre of cultish apocalypse that seems to be hovering just beyond the horizon these days.

Lovecraft (1890–1937) was a fashioner of horror and fantasy that peered into the vertigo of the sublime. His works, published in pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*, were often about confronting the unknown, which by his (and most other people's) reckoning meant most of the universe. Lovecraft was prolific, though not widely recognised during his lifetime. It wasn't until the 1970s that his work was more widely distributed and held up as a paragon of fantasy writing, feeding into the roleplaying games of the 1980s, films such as *Re-Animator* (1985), the work of Alan Moore, David Lynch, *The X-Files* and later Cthulhu fluffy toys. If it's weird, uncanny, creepy and a bit tenacle-y, then the tendency now is to point to Lovecraft as an influence. Donna Haraway might have intended her designation of our current time as the 'Chthulucene' as a reference to an underground chthonic species and not Lovecraft's monster, but given the prominence of neo-gothic, supernatural and horror in all corners of culture, as well as the fundamental ominous weirdness of reality itself now, we could well be living in a Lovecraftian Cthulhucene.

'All my tales', he once said, 'are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large.' That preoccupation in his fiction, however, didn't seem to stop him attempting to intervene in human affairs, writing publicly and often on the views he held as an amateur journalist, atheist and, most vehemently, white supremacist. The statue for the World Fantasy Awards, established in 1975, for decades was the 'Howard', a statuette of Lovecraft's head. It wasn't until 2015, after numerous campaigners and winners of the awards protested, that this changed. Recent works like N.K. Jemisin's *Great Cities* (2020–22) series of novels and Misha Green's TV series *Lovecraft Country* (2020; based on a 2016 novel by Matt Ruff) have engaged with Lovecraft's influence on the wider fantasy genre while trying to reckon with the racism that informs and underpins his work; but the delusions and selective convictions under which he strived seem to remain their own persistent myth, finding uncanny echoes in the rhetoric of far-right governments globally.

In 1927, in the one-off magazine *The Recluse*, Lovecraft set out a 28,000-word essay that lined up his own pantheon of likeminded authors. 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' was his history of the horror genre, from Ancient Greek Phlegon to what he deemed 'modern masters' such as Arthur Machen and Montague Rhodes James. Starting from the dawn of time – 'As may naturally be expected of a form so closely connected with primal emotion, the horror-tale is as old as human thought and speech themselves' – Lovecraft briefly surveys the eras up to his present, with only Edgar Allan Poe getting a section to himself: 'to him we owe the modern horror-story in its final and perfected state'. The introduction to this work, reprinted here, acts as a sort of manifesto in précis of Lovecraft's approach to writing, and to his take on the cosmic sublime. Lovecraft's views here – of the innate weirdness that resides within and all around us, which can be used as a sort of antidote to the increasing demands of sense and logic – seem parallel to that of many artists today. Which also raises the question of what assumptions lie behind those views, and how we treat the unfamiliar and the unknown – with curiosity, or with fear?

Supernatural Horror in Literature

by H.P. Lovecraft, published in The Recluse, *1927*
Annotated by Chris Fite-Wassilak

Re-Animator, 1985, dir Stuart Gordon

H.P. Lovecraft, 1934.
Photo: Lucius B. Truesdell

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form. Against it are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to uplift the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism.

> *The opening gambit is Lovecraft's central one, running through all his work. The key issue, though, is what we might define as 'unknown'... and what the 'suitable degree' of smirk might really be. In this, Lovecraft seeks to argue that his abnormal, fantastic tales are in fact more reflective of normality than most people think.*

But in spite of all this opposition the weird tale has survived, developed, and attained remarkable heights of perfection; founded as it is on a profound and elementary principle whose appeal, if not always universal, must necessarily be poignant and permanent to minds of the requisite sensitiveness.

The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from every-day life. Relatively few are free enough from the spell of the daily routine to respond to rappings from outside, and tales of ordinary feelings and events, or of common sentimental distortions of such feelings and events, will always take first place in the taste of the majority; rightly, perhaps, since of course these ordinary matters make up the greater part of human experience. But the sensitive are always with us, and sometimes a curious streak of fancy invades an obscure corner of the very hardest head; so that no amount of rationalisation, reform, or Freudian analysis can quite annul the thrill of the chimney-corner whisper or the lonely wood. There is here involved a psychological pattern or tradition as real and as deeply grounded in mental experience as any other pattern or tradition of mankind; coeval with the religious feeling and closely related to many aspects of it, and too much a part of our inmost biological heritage to lose keen potency over a very important, though not numerically great, minority of our species.

While Lovecraft is sceptical of his contemporary Sigmund Freud and Freud's theories regarding diagnosis and treatment, it's clear that psychoanalysis was a profound influence on his work. Photo: Robert Huffstutte / CC BY 2.0

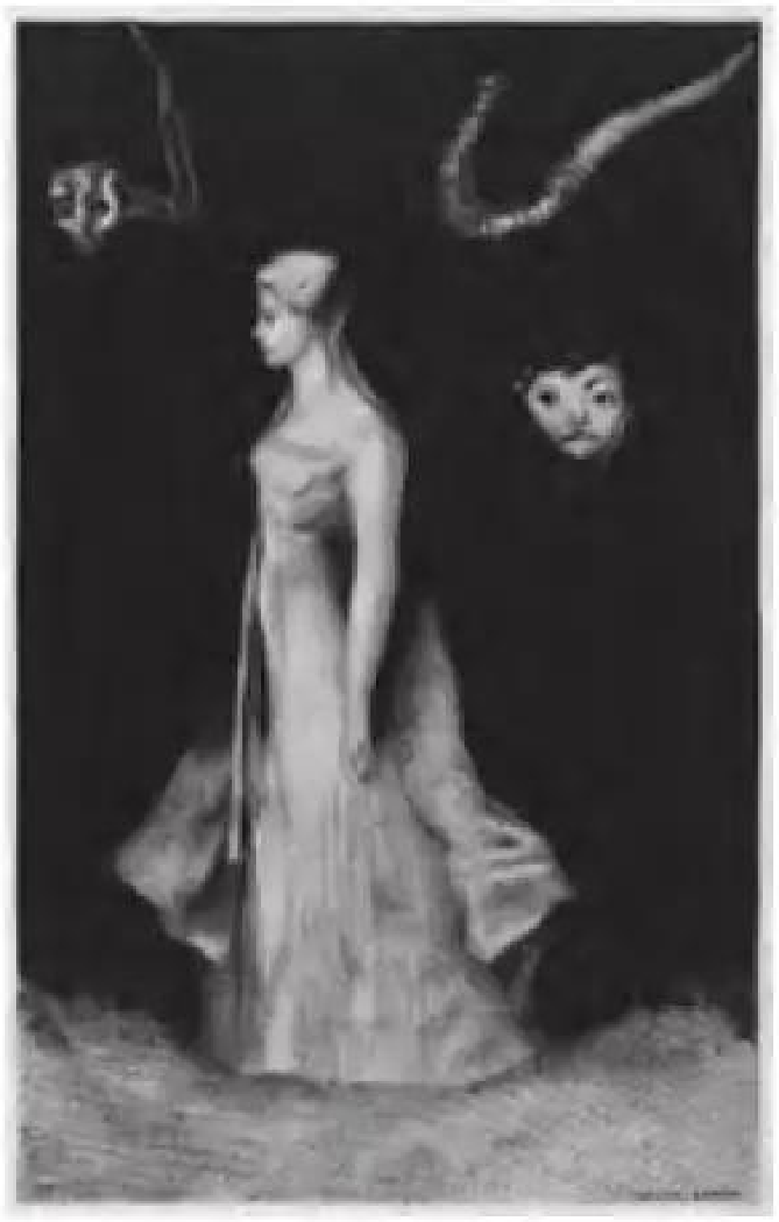
> *It takes a special kind of person, Lovecraft asserts, to be properly afraid. Not too stuck in the daily grind, tuned into the universe (an overly sensitive type, like… errr… an artist). Note his casual insults to the reader who might not agree – delusional, in denial and a bit thick. Explain it away how you like, he insists, but fear is ancient and innate (unlike psychoanalysis, which is new and therefore lesser). By extension, fear becomes the conduit to actually understand and, it is implied, govern over, the masses.*

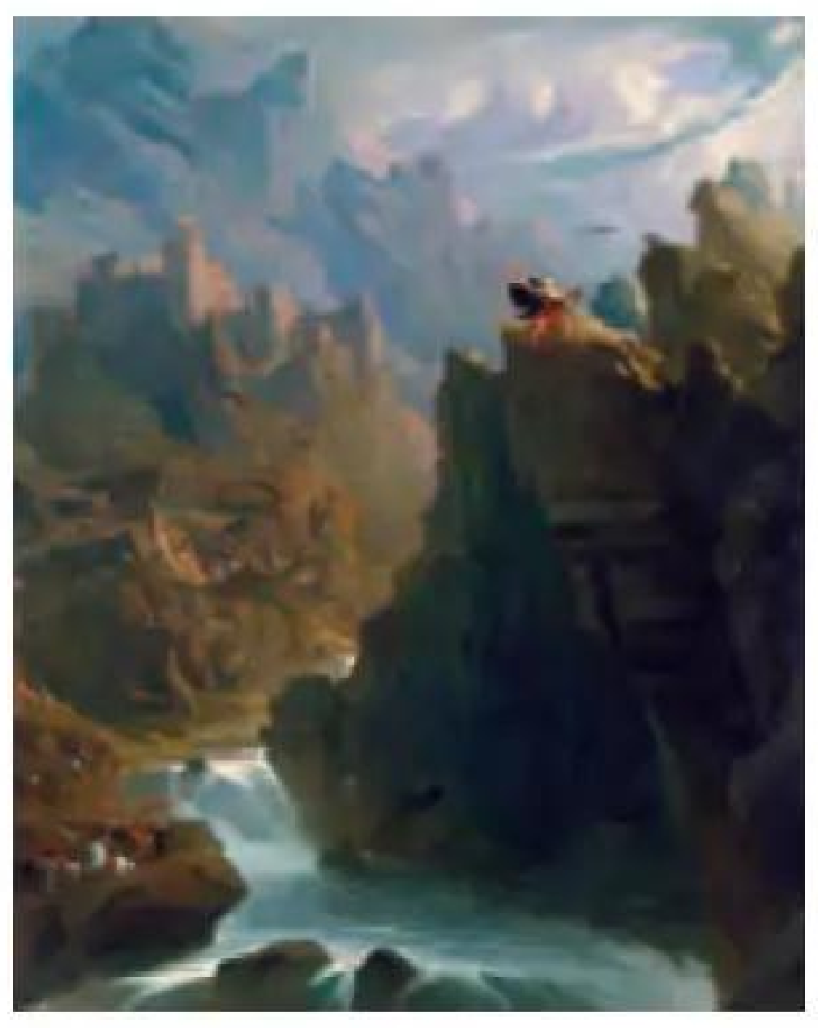
Man's first instincts and emotions formed his response to the environment in which he found himself. Definite feelings based on pleasure and pain grew up around the phenomena whose causes and effects he understood, whilst around those which he did not understand – and the universe teemed with them in the early days – were naturally woven such personifications, marvellous interpretations, and sensations of awe and fear as would be hit upon by a race having few and simple ideas and limited experience. The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part.

> *Here Lovecraft seems to anticipate US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's infamous 2002 speech as America prepared to invade Iraq as part of the 'War on Terror' campaign: 'There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tends to be the difficult ones.' Although Rumsfeld never acknowledged his sources.*

Donald Rumsfeld. Photo: Scott Davis, US Army

The phenomenon of dreaming likewise helped to build up the notion of an unreal or spiritual world; and in general, all the conditions of savage dawn-life so strongly conduced toward a feeling of the supernatural, that we need not wonder at the thoroughness with which man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition. That saturation must, as a matter of plain scientific fact, be regarded as virtually permanent so far as the subconscious mind and inner instincts are concerned; for though the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos, whilst a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings around all the objects and processes that were once mysterious, however well they may now be explained. And more than this, there is an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue, which would make them obscurely operative even were the conscious mind to be purged of all sources of wonder.


Odilon Redon, *Haunting*, 1893–94, lithograph, 36 × 23 cm. Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

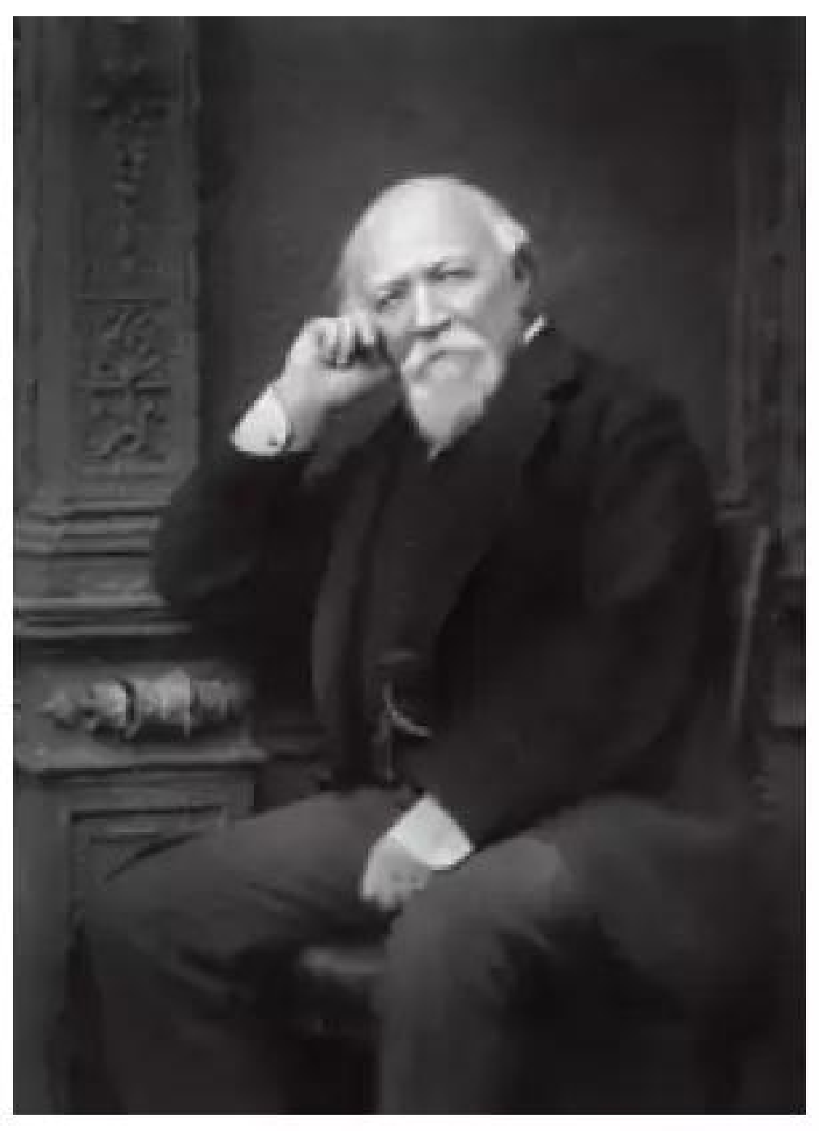


The first study of the sublime (*On the Sublime*, published during the first century CE) is ascribed to the Greek author Longinus, although in truth no one knew who the author actually was. This is a known unknown that is also an unknown unknown. The sublime later became popular in eighteenth-century philosophy and aesthetics, a cypher for the unknowable in works by writers such as Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Unknowable was in turn largely a cypher for incomprehensibly big. Artists such as John Martin (above: *The Bard*, 1817, courtesy Yale Center for British Art, New Haven) became specialists in rendering this incomprehensibleness comprehensible in oil paintings. Which rather made a nonsense of the whole thing. Which, in itself, might be considered sublime because incomprehensible.

> *Here Lovecraft gives and he takes. Science is invoked as a double-edged sword: both a means of understanding why we are the way we are, but also one of the things obscuring that very same understanding. Riddling, of course, is a typical trope of the weird tale. Either way, Lovecraft is suggesting, forget things like the Romantics and their views of Nature, or even the Industrialised vastness: it is fear that is the new religion and what truly invokes the contemporary sense of the sublime.*

Because we remember pain and the menace of death more vividly than pleasure, and because our feelings toward the beneficent aspects of the unknown have from the first been captured and formalised by conventional religious rituals, it has fallen to the lot of the darker and more maleficent side of cosmic mystery to figure chiefly in our popular supernatural folklore. This tendency, too, is naturally enhanced by the fact that uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities. When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse.

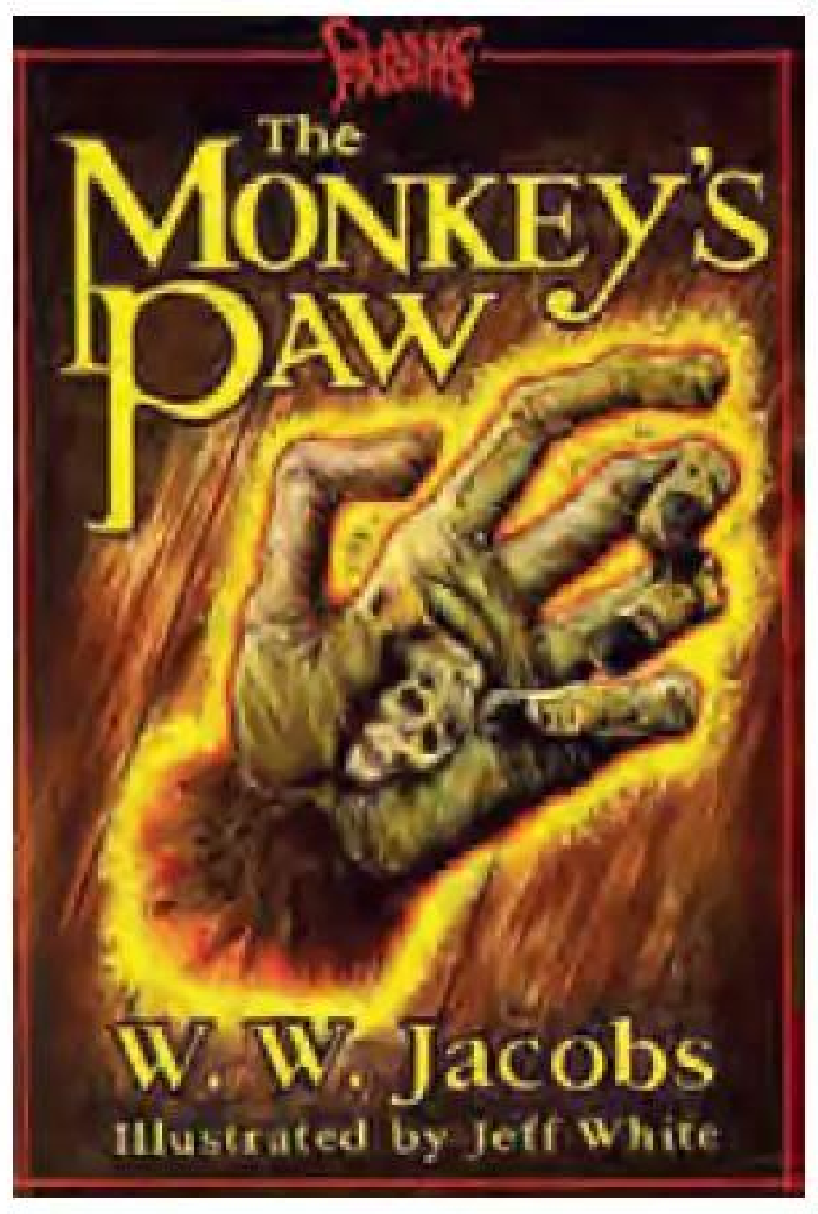
> *This is where the ethical aspect starts to creep in more overtly. While Lovecraft's sweeping adjectives like 'cosmic' and 'fathomless' (he loved an 'eldritch') could just be seen as accounting for vastness, or the possibility of knowing, the underlying assumption is consistently that unknown = evil. It's worth thinking about parallel attempts at the time, in the years after the First World War, of making sense of destruction and humanity's place in the world, say the Surrealists who looked to the interior unknown, and the subconscious as a place of whimsy and potential delight, as well as less wholesome pursuits. For Lovecraft, though, this was an external matter: the truth is out there. And it's coming for you.*



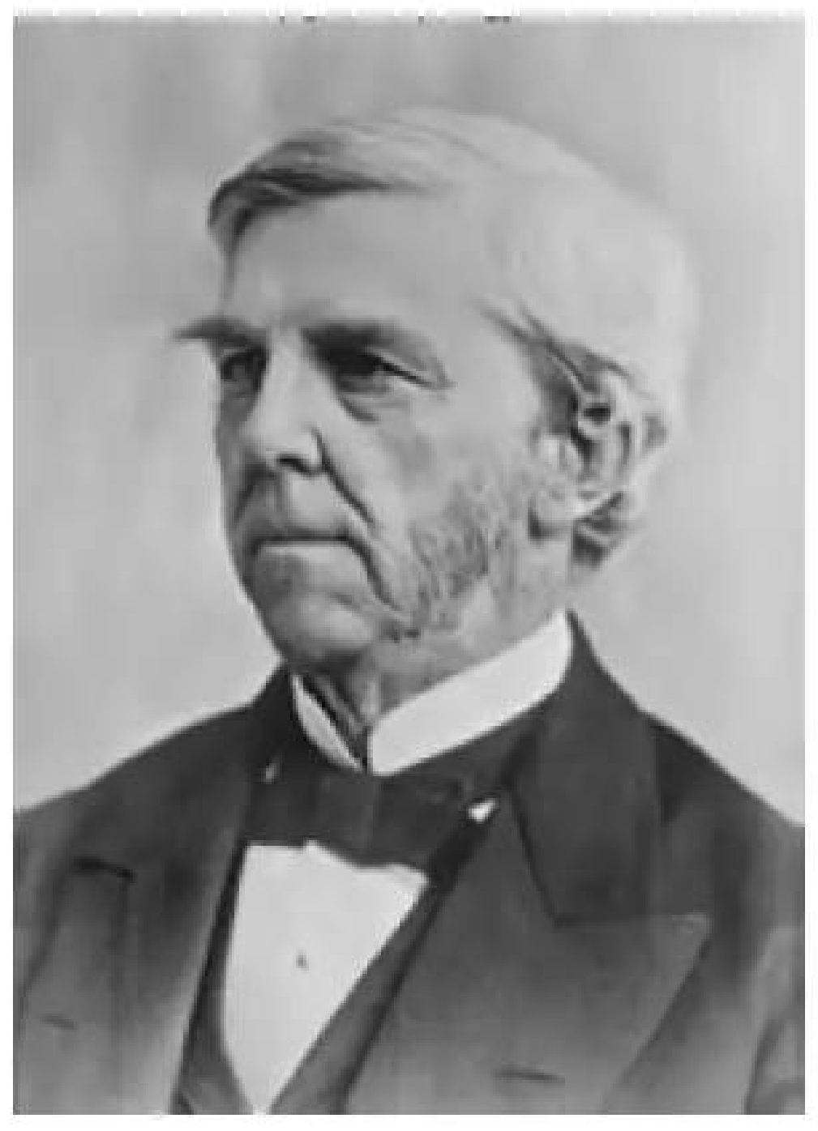
'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' (1852) is a narrative poem by the English writer Robert Browning. In it, the narrator, Childe Roland, describes being persuaded by a 'hoary cripple' to turn off his path and head down a less promising track towards a dark tower. The route gets more and more ominous as he progresses and Roland begins to feel more ancient and friendless. Photo: Herbert Rose Barraud

With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist; and no better evidence of its tenacious vigour can be cited than the impulse which now and then drives writers of totally opposite leanings to try their hands at it in isolated tales, as if to discharge from their minds certain phantasmal shapes which would otherwise haunt them. Thus Dickens wrote several eerie narratives; Browning, the hideous poem 'Childe Roland'; Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*; Dr. Holmes, the subtle novel *Elsie Venner*; F. Marion Crawford, 'The Upper Berth' and a number of other examples; Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, social worker, 'The Yellow Wall Paper'; whilst the humourist W.W. Jacobs produced that able melodramatic bit called 'The Monkey's Paw'.

This type of fear-literature must not be confounded with a type externally similar but psychologically widely different; the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome. Such writing, to be sure, has its place, as has the conventional or even whimsical or humorous ghost story where formalism or the author's knowing wink removes the true sense of the morbidly unnatural;



A 1997 reprint of W.W. Jacobs's short story 'The Monkey's Paw', first published in *Harper's Monthly*, September 1902

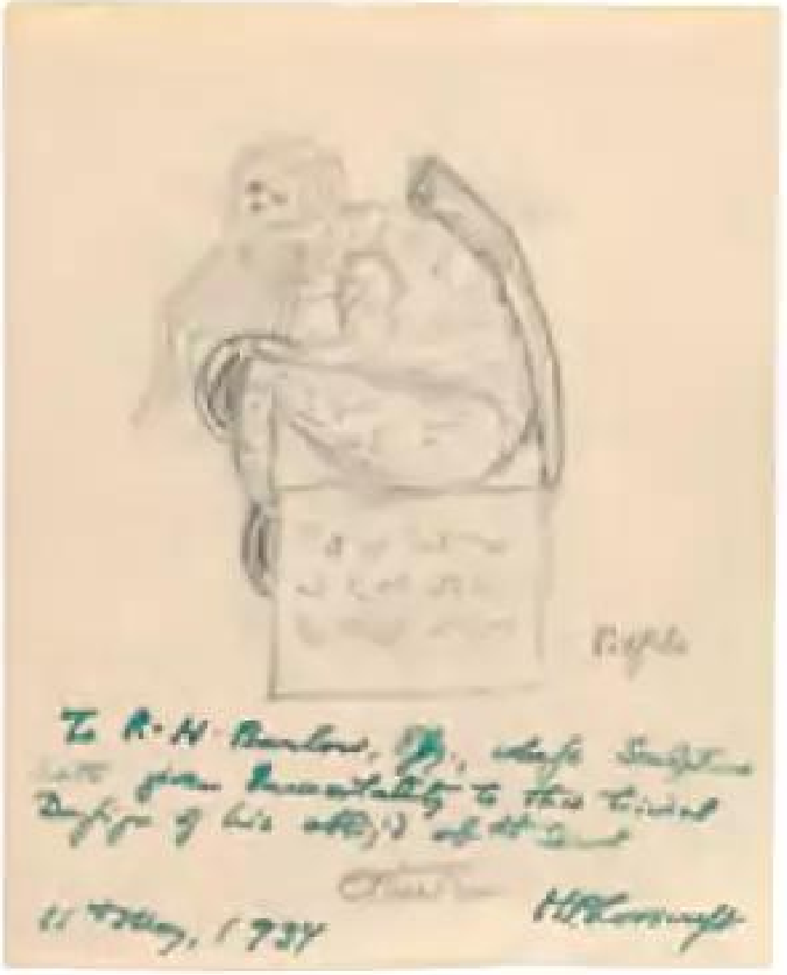


Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny (1861) is a novel by the American Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. It concerns a child whose mother was bitten by a snake while pregnant, who subsequently developed reptilian properties. Courtesy US Library of Congress, Washington, DC

but these things are not the literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense. The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.

Assuming much of the planet is 'plumbed space', and we can't comprehend a world without plumbing. In other nonfiction writings, Lovecraft would also write about encounters with the 'alien'. But in those cases, he usually meant anyone who wasn't of Anglo-Saxon descent, 'dark forces' that were pulling apart his whitebread New England vision of America.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a notable feminist author. Her story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) is on the subject of (severe) postpartum depression. Photo: Frances Benjamin Johnston. Courtesy US Library of Congress, Washington, DC



H. P. Lovecraft, sketch of Cthulhu, 1934. Howard P. Lovecraft Collection, Brown Digital Repository, Brown University Library, Providence

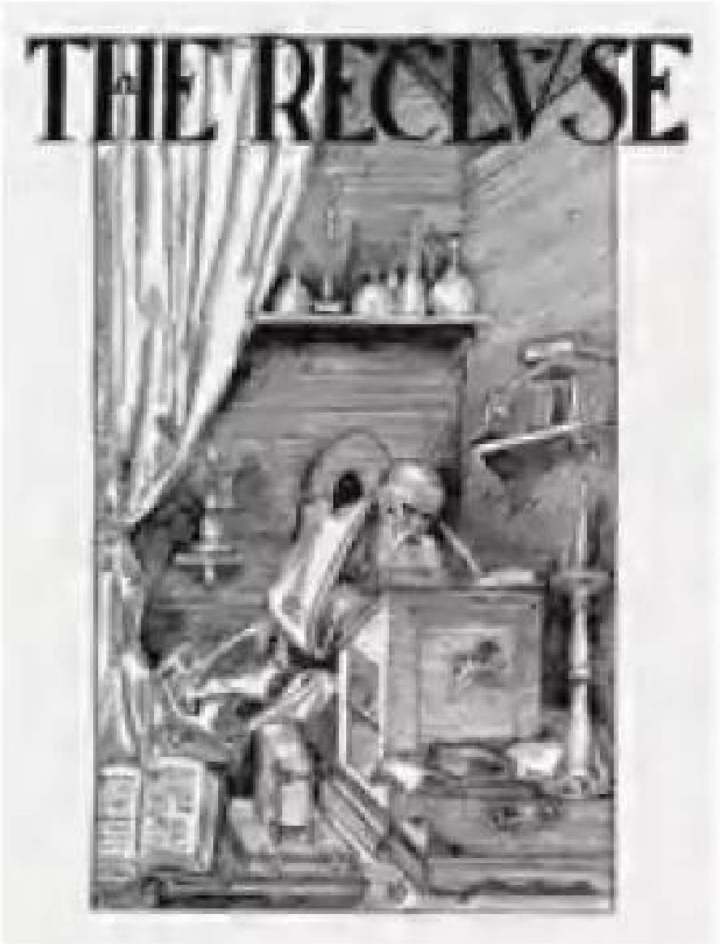
Naturally we cannot expect all weird tales to conform absolutely to any theoretical model. Creative minds are uneven, and the best of fabrics have their dull spots. Moreover, much of the choicest weird work is unconscious; appearing in memorable fragments scattered through material whose massed effect may be of a very different cast. Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. We may say, as a general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear; but it remains a fact that such narratives often possess, in isolated sections, atmospheric touches which fulfil every condition of true supernatural horror-literature.

Here Lovecraft anticipates the culture of 'unlearning' that is widely celebrated in artistic circles today.

Therefore, we must judge a weird tale not by the author's intent, or by the mere mechanics of the plot; but by the emotional level which it attains at its least mundane point. If the proper sensations are excited, such a 'high spot' must be admitted on its own merits as weird literature, no matter how prosaically it is later dragged down.

It's all vibes. Deeply unsettling and nauseating vibes.

The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim. And of course, the more completely and unifiedly a story conveys this atmosphere, the better it is as a work of art in the given medium.



H. P. Lovecraft, 'Introduction' to 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', published in the inaugural and final edition of The Recluse, *in 1927, by W. Paul Cook, 'to please the producer only'*

Skin care

Kateřina
Vincourová

02/10/2025
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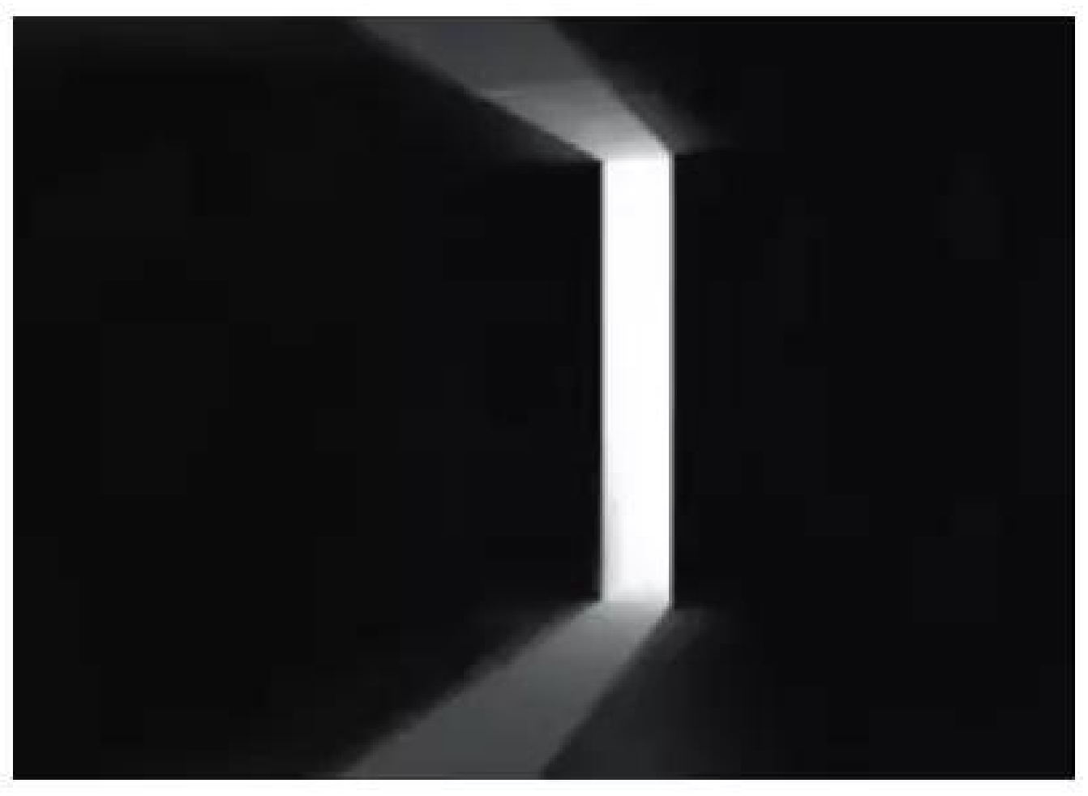
Exhibitions
October–December

PROGRAMME 2025

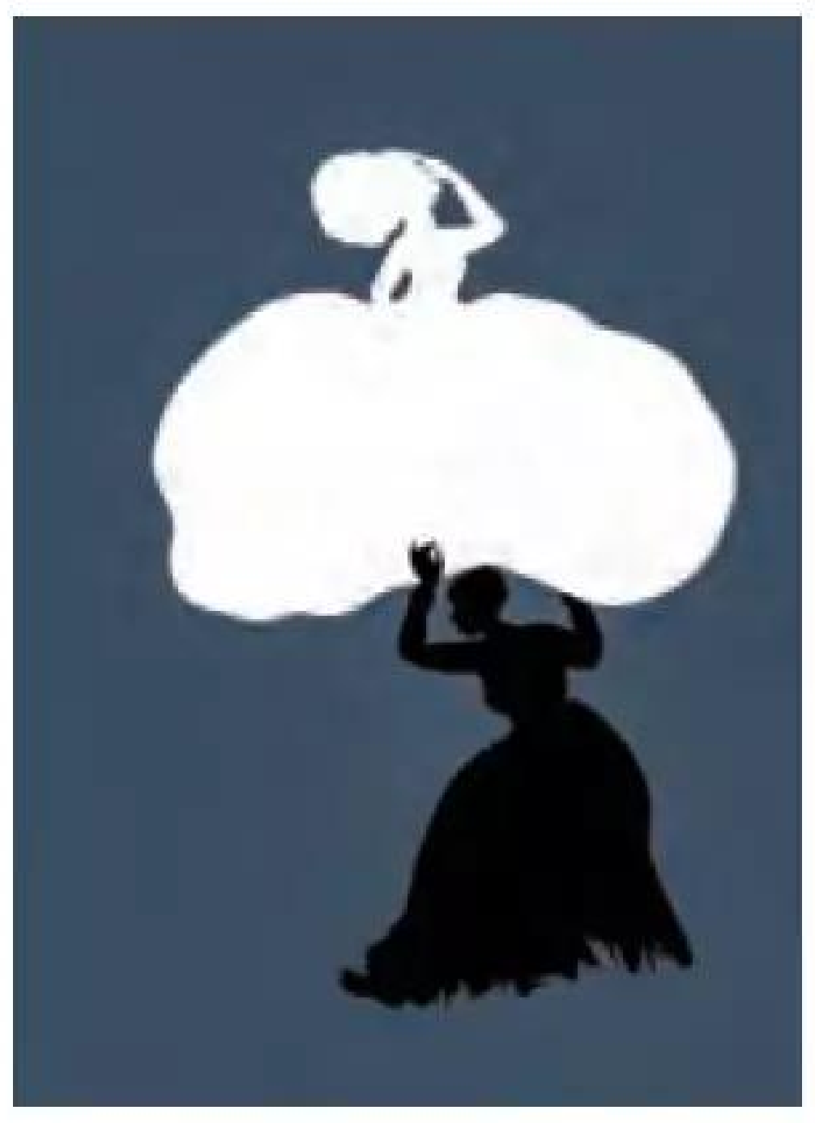
G1



INHABITING THE SHADOWS

25.09.^{2025}—18.01.^{2026}

G3



Kara Walker, *The Emancipation Aproximation Scene #18*, 2000.
MACA. Michael Jenkins and Javier Romero Collection

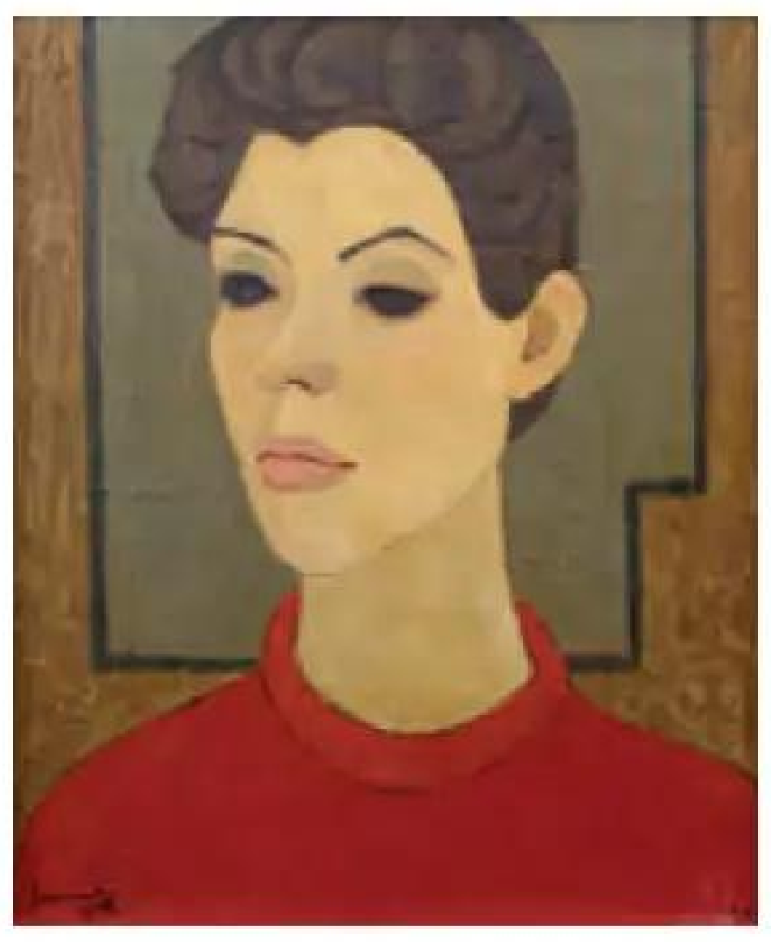
KARA WALKER. BURNING VILLAGE

25.09.^{2025}—23.02.^{2026}

G4

DARING TO GO FURTHER

20.11.^{2025}—01.02.^{2026}



Jacinta Gil, *Autorretrato*, 1957.
IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat

G5

CRISTINA GARCÍA RODERO. HIDDEN SPAIN

04.12.^{2025}—08.02.^{2026}

Cristina García Rodero, *La confesión. Saavedra, Begonte*, 1980. © Cristina García Rodero

G6

Andrea Canepa, *As we dwell in the fold*.
Installation view at the MSU Broad Museum,
East Lansing, US, 2023

ANDREA CANEPA. BETWEEN THE DEEP AND THE DISTANT

11.12.^{2025}—13.04.^{2026}

G7

Work by weecolors, guest artist invited
to create the image for the second edition
of the *Art i Context* programme

ART I CONTEXT 2023-2025

14.11.^{2025}—11.01.^{2026}

IVAM

Art Reviewed

What is to be done

36th Bienal de São Paulo *Not All Travellers Walk Roads*

Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, São Paulo 6 September – 11 January

The 36th Bienal de São Paulo takes its compass – and its title – from a 1990 poem by the Afro-Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo, an inspiration which may remain inaccessible to Eurocentric minds for refusing the Western dictat of 'transparency' and diving deep in Afrodiasporic erudition. The exhibition advances a coherent and resilient conceptual structure, a consistently pertinent selection of 120 artists, rigorous research and, simultaneously, problematic exhibition design within the Bienal's mainstay home of Oscar Niemeyer's modernist pavilion. *Not All Travellers Walk Roads*, as both title and guiding argument, offers new routes of experimentation and affect that open onto a present of uncertainty and serendipity. The subtitle, *Of Humanity as Practice*, further clarifies the lyrical title, underscoring that this Bienal is concerned with social gathering, collective imagination and listening acts.

Led by chief curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (currently director of Berlin's HKW) with cocurators Alya Sebti, Anna Roberta Goetz and Thiago de Paula Souza, and cocurator-at-large Keyna Eleison, this edition is the culmination of Ndikung's research on pidginisation as curatorial practice, tangling with Édouard Glissant's claim to the right to opacity in his *Poetics of Relation* (1990) as much as with the individual trajectories of each cocurator. Its central curatorial image is the estuary – aqueous environments where distinct bodies of water meet to generate new life – while it itself branches into its own tributaries in a vigorous public programme of parallel activations, such as meetings with performance, music and poetry, that frame the Bienal as a crossing of a watercourse (may it be a brook or an ocean) for reencounter, treating time itself as a platform.

The striking presence of commissioned works underscores the depth of exchanges with artists during the lead-up to the exhibition, reminding us that all curatorial practice is carried out collectively. Pol Taburet's *Someone's Child* (2025), for instance, is a commanding installation of large bronze and cement sculptures that fill a dedicated room: humanoid figures with oversize trumpets occupy the floor and perch on wall-mounted ledges like Catholic saints. They encircle a being that looks like what might happen if the snake in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (1943) – which swallowed an elephant and resembled a hat – were to don two Joseph Beuys-style hats. Both intimidating and seductively figurative, the sculptures trigger speculation about what they are; their ethereal quality, accentuated by monstrous yet sacral overtones, is intensified by a spectral sound installation and ceiling diffused lighting, producing a liminal atmosphere.

To frame collective joy as a curatorial argument is, in itself, a critique of present structures. Alongside such expressions of humanitarian exultation, the Bienal also features works that entwine confrontation and resistance that express denunciations of ongoing genocides. Christopher Cozier's *After the Appeal Will Come the Next Delivery* (2025) features multiple flags raised outside the Bienal pavilion. With its palette of green, red and black (resonating with Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Forbidden Colors*, 1988, not on show), the work signals the urgent need to cease any genocide, such as the ones unfolding in Gaza and Sudan. Forensic Architecture/Forensis's newly commissioned video *The People's Court I* (2025) traces the harrowing, ecocidal, sea-level rise in the Niger Delta caused by oil giants such as Chevron. In less than eight years, more than a thousand homes, hospitals and schools have been submerged, alongside the decimation of mangrove flora in the Ugbo Kingdom. Also consequential is Madame Zo's extraordinary textile abstractions – woven from cotton and silk yet laced with filmstrips, shredded newspaper and magnetic tape – born of her critique of Madagascar's ecopolitical structures.

Antonio Társis presents *Orchestra Catastrophe: Act I* (2025), a vast walk-through installation composed of matchbox panels glued into large planes, handcrafted leather *atabaque* drums,

Not All Travellers Walk Roads, 2025 (installation view featuring Isa Genzken, *Schauspieler III, 2*, 2015, and Maxwell Alexandre, *Galeria 2*, 2025). Photo: Levi Fanan. Courtesy Fundação Bienal de São Paulo dangling hunks of coal suspended like pendants from the ceiling and speakers. Exploring the multiple cultural resonances of the matchbox – long central to his practice – Társis draws on its use as percussion by samba musicians in Salvador, like Mestre Batatinha, while confronting the relentless global extraction of mineral resources. Charcoal blocks threaded with cords crash against massive drums by automated systems, producing vibrations that course through the visitor's body. Over time, the installation unravels: shards of coal placed atop upturned speakers tremble and splinter under deep bass, the sound of the exhibition's space captured live and amplified through the speakers. The louder and more crowded the Bienal grows, the more the work devolves into noisy entropy. Társis's inquiry zeroes in on the often-violent activity of mineral extraction in Africa – in Rwanda, Nigeria, Congo and Zambia – that fuels the global electronics industry. Each phone, each device that connects us, contains fragments of rare matter hewn from Africa, as well as China and Brazil. The Bienal's curatorial vision of creating an estuary where dispersed communities fractured by the African diaspora might converge finds its perfect expression in Társis's work – one of this edition's strongest.

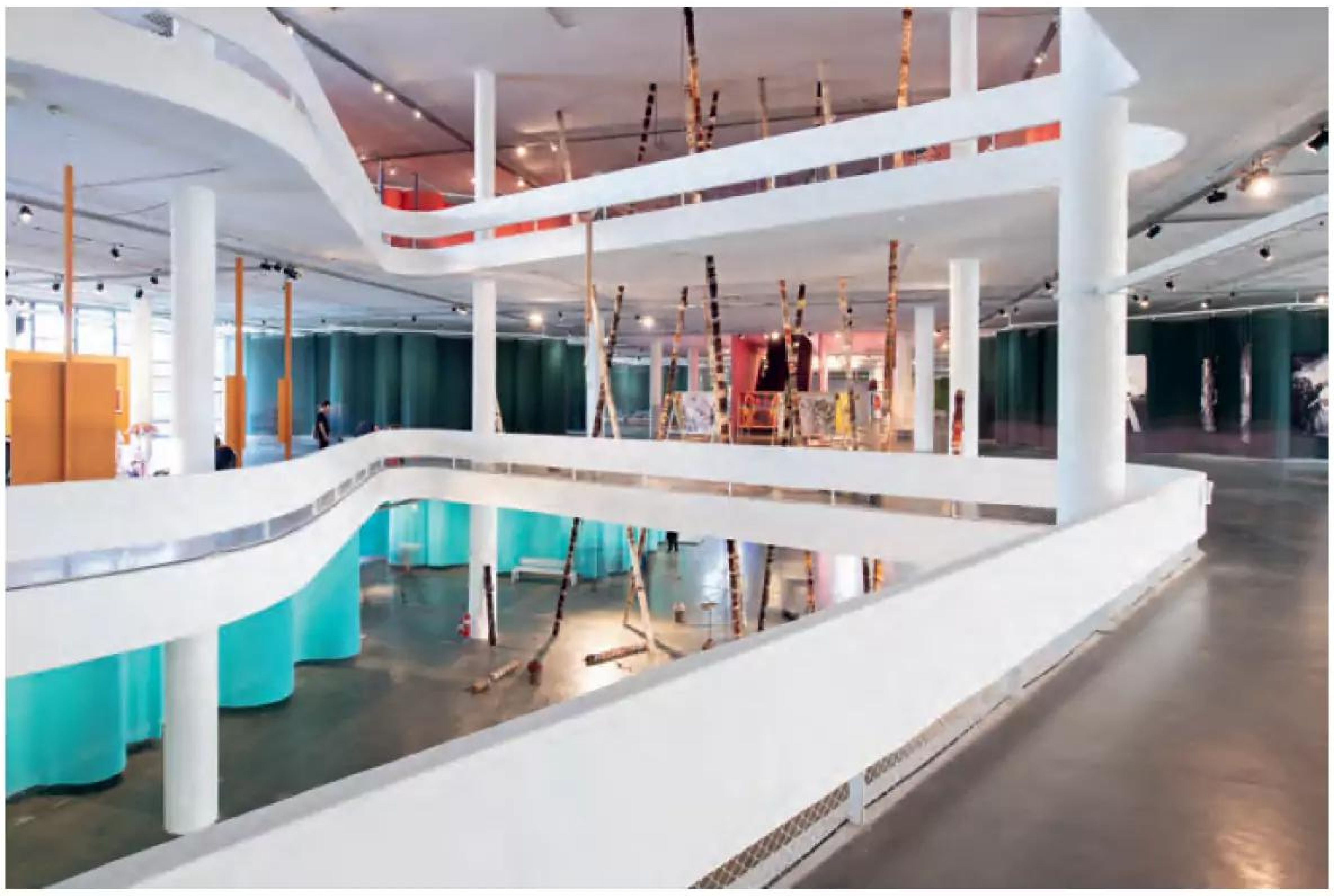
The exhibition design emerges as perhaps its most contentious point, a multilayered issue. Its triumph lies in spatial generosity: works are granted room to breathe, circulation feels open and inviting. Yet vast curtains – undulating in vibrant orange, turquoise and ashen green, evoking river currents – function less as autonomous elements or dividers than as scenic drapery disguising the provisional walls the curators erected. Numerous smaller rooms – housing installations, videoworks and a large historical nucleus on the third floor – are hidden behind these veils.

This architectural paradigm is mirrored, perhaps answered, by Maxwell Alexandre's *Galeria 2* (2025). Sheets of kraft paper, a hallmark of a period of his practice, are painted white and suspended to emulate the white cube architecture of galleries. Both painterly and conceptual, the brilliant installation incisively critiques the power structures that choreograph institutional spaces and the discursive possibilities of painting itself, even scenographic or conceptual. Questions about power and performativity reverberate in other works within this staged cube-gallery – such as Isa Genzken's *Schauspieler III, 2* (Actor III, 2, 2015), camp mannequins in graffiti-tagged clothing that evoke multiple sociopolitical roles.

I expected this Bienal to push harder against the modernist austerity of Niemeyer's white edifice, with a more emphatic chromatic presence, as Ndikung did with *O Quilombismo*, an exhibition he organised at HKW in 2023 that featured 12 artists present in this Bienal. To curate the Bienal de São Paulo always means confronting Niemeyer's caprices, above all the atrium whose ramps ribbon upward, visible from every level (a similar spatial specificity occurs, for instance, in the atrium of New York's Guggenheim or in Tate's Turbine Hall in London). Possible strategies include refusing its supremacy – as in the last edition, *Choreographies of the Impossible*, which erected new walls and blocked all sightlines across the atrium – or outright negation, as in the 28th edition, 2003's *In Living Contact*, known as the Biennial of the Void, which left an entire floor cavernously empty.

Given this edition's curatorial framework, stripping the atrium of its symbolic weight seemed the likeliest path. Instead, it was given to weaker works, such as Laure Prouvost's *Flow, Flower: Bloom!* (2025), a chandelierlike kinetic piece, its voile petals scarcely convincing. Tanka Fonta's remarkable practice – worthy of the reverence afforded to Frank Bowling's 24 canvases – is reduced to a massive column wrap: though it reads like a mural with geometric elements with a cosmic aspect, the exposed cords betray it as a canvas ill-fitted around the atrium's pillar, with a makeshift finish.

Other works might have thrived in this central stage – particularly Ana Raylander Mártis dos Anjos's monumental installation *A casa de Bené* (Bené's House, 2025). Nine towering wooden columns draped with textiles and leather that reconstruct her great-grandfather's demolished home in a mining-devastated town in Minas Gerais. This stunning installation seems to pierce floors: columns cut off at one ceiling continue on the floor below. Usually seen as vernacular or even naive, her ancestor's wattle-and-daub columns prove more historically resonant than the white Niemeyer pylons that flank them. Such is the structure through which the entire Bienal unfolds. *Mateus Nunes*



Not All Travellers Walk Roads, 2025 (installation view featuring Ana Raylander Mártis dos Anjos, *A casa de Bené*, 2025). Photo: Levi Fanan. Courtesy Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

Ren Light Pan *Nude and Number*

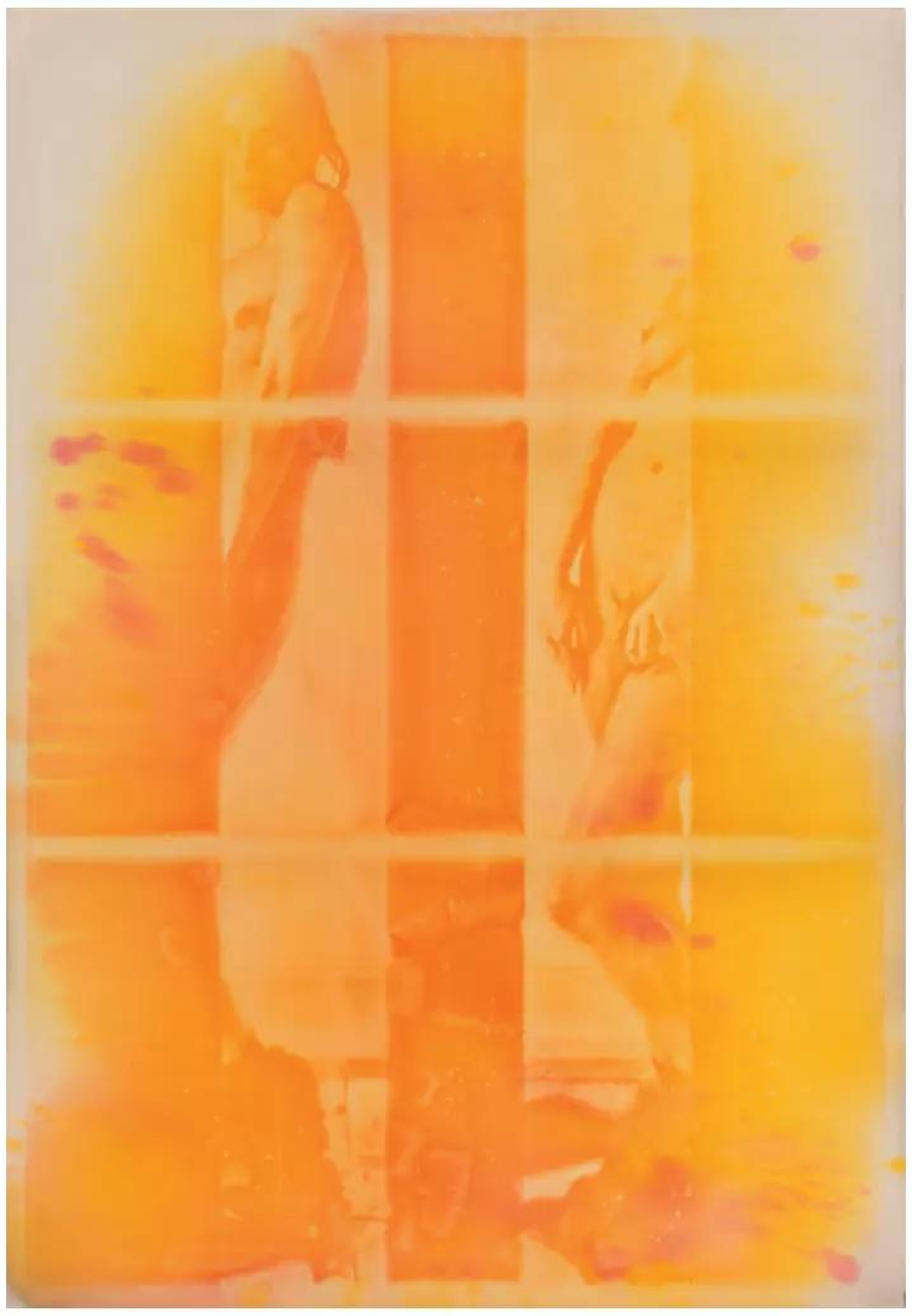
Lyles & King, New York 3 September – 4 October

Although this solo show of works by Chinese-American artist Ren Light Pan centres on nude self-portraits, it is marked less by a sense of exhibitionism than by an air of reticence. In many of her monumental ink portraits, Pan lifts a loose garment over her head, exposing her breasts and penis but obscuring her face. This occurs in *Eight Search Results, Saint Sebastian* (all works 2025), whose title refers to an early Christian martyr often depicted with his arms bound above his head, and in *Three Standard Stoppages*, whose title alludes to a 1913–14 work by Marcel Duchamp that plays at inventing a new and arbitrary unit of measurement. While Pan's shrouded face and posture invoke a very twentieth-century kind of surrealist uncanny, given the US's ongoing legal and existential attacks against transgender individuals, the action coupled with the show's references to martyrdom and metrics calls up grimmer associations.

Apart from four columnal wooden sculptures, Pan's works here are two-dimensional, on stretched canvas and muslin. On several of these surfaces are applications of Chinese ink and water that, following a period of exposure to infrared light, have come out looking like low-contrast daguerreotypes. The application of ink to stretched fabric produces a peculiar visual effect: the translucent grey wash bleeds through to the T-shaped stretcher bars such that these forms register on the fabric, crosses and verticals that then seem to veil Pan's nude form. Her reticent figure lives behind the stretcher bars the way some of Georgia O'Keeffe's sun-stained, moonlight-soaked New Mexico landscapes recede behind large Penitente crosses.

If Pan's work produces artistic déjà vu, there are ample suggestions that this is intentional. In an untitled watercolour work on muslin, she poses like Donatello's bronze sculpture *David* (c. 1440). In the tangy, yellow-toned *Venus at Sunset, Dramatic Scrap*, a rare work in which the artist's face is prominent, Pan stands like a Graeco-Roman statue of the goddess of beauty, with her arms coyly appearing to shield but instead accentuating her nakedness. In *Eight Search Results, Saint Sebastian*, the artist is surrounded by variously stylised iterations of her own name; this work seems to signal her desire to inscribe herself into the annals of art history, one motivation, perhaps, for her to adopt the guises of icons of beauty and valour across the gender spectrum. The four sculptures in the show, made from thin, curled sheets of mahogany, cherry, maple and birch with more images of Pan inked on them and all titled *Veneer*, stand huddled in a corner of the gallery like castoff shells, residues of a process of continual self-creation.

Sequences of steely, sans-serif numerals scattered across Pan's self-portraits prevent them from falling into the familiar sentiments of homage and revisionism. In *Three Standard Stoppages*, ten digits – unitless, à la Duchamp – run down the picture like height markers in a chilling mugshot. In *Bathers*, a surveilling eye assigns numbers to a row of ten Pans, some represented only by their upstretched hands. In *From Five (no. 2)*, numbers descend from five to zero above the artist's supine form, counting down to an end unknown. Confronted with Pan's protruding ribs, sunken stomach and pelvic bones, one suspects that attempting to decode the gestures and refusals of the nude may be distracting us from other, more plainly evident revelations – about the violence of visibility and the arbitrariness of value – detonating in the space around it. *Jenny Wu*



Cutie, Mandarin, 2025, watercolour, infrared light and muslin, 213 × 147 cm. Photo: Matt Grubb. Courtesy the artist and Lyles & King, New York

The Shed

Croy Nielsen, Vienna 5 September – 4 October

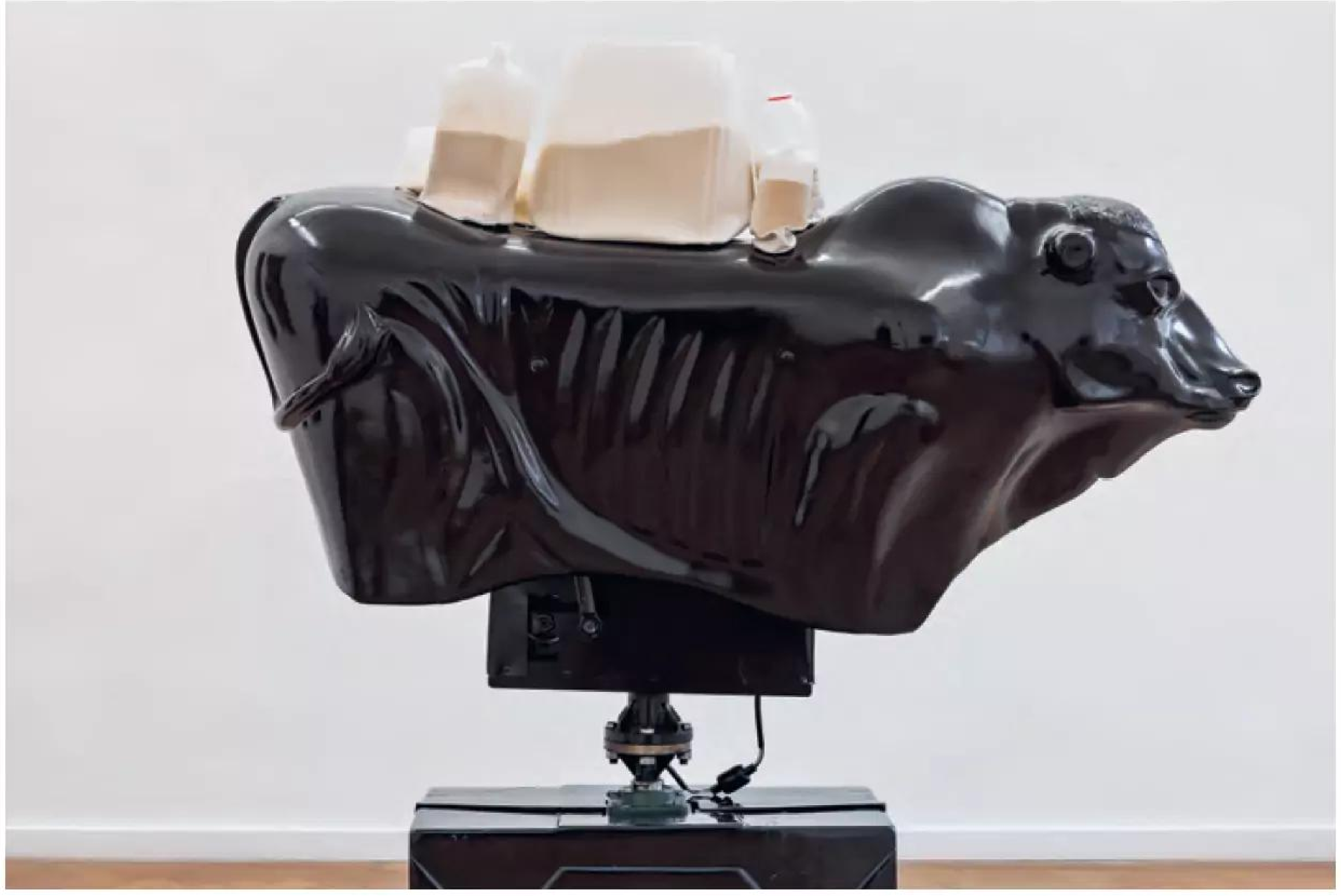
A beast rotates in jerky movements at the centre of *The Shed,* a four-person show guest-curated by Karen Archey. The mechanical roar and heavy mass of Nina Beier's *Beast* (2024), a dark brown rodeo bull, reverberates uncomfortably in the viewer's body: this manmade entertainment machine stages the macho striving for domination in the bluntest possible terms. On its back, though, the animal carries plastic jugs filled with infant formula derived from cow's milk. The clash between the natural and the industrially produced is stark. Here, the consumable female body and questions of gender relations within parenthood intersect with the exploitation of animals – who, despite the bull's apparent resistance, cannot throw off what binds them.

Beier's work resonates with three 2018 wallworks from Alice Channer's photo-relief series *Soft Sediment Deformation*, which also traverses the unstable borderlands of nature and machine. What at first resemble blowups of fish- or snakeskin turn out to be glitchy images of rock formations, stretched and distorted. The planet meets digital processing and the extractive logics of industrial production. Printed onto heavy crêpe de chine and pleated with fast-fashion techniques, these works are delicate yet unsettling in how they alienate and confine nature, reducing it to an ornamental pattern.

Beier's and Channer's positions are framed, in turn, by pieces from two American artists of an earlier generation, Lynda Benglis and Judith Bernstein. The phallic screw-tool hybrid of Bernstein's monumental charcoal drawing *SCREW 5* (2014) faces Beier's bull head-on, its black marks executed with insistent ferocity. Bernstein started this series in 1969, speaking forcefully to the persistence of patriarchal power until today. (The merging of machinic hardness with the organic body and the resulting aggressiveness of the imagery recalls Lee Lozano's work of the 1960s.) A reference to the famous removal of Bernstein's 1973 drawing *Horizontal* from a 1974 show in Philadelphia appears in the gallery office. The black charcoal drawing *Small Horizontal Number 8* (1973), where the tip of the depicted penis is only vaguely recognisable through the expressive markmaking, anchors the surrounding works in a historical context – one whose relevance has hardly diminished, given the renewed political pressure from the far right on progressive positions in academia and the arts today. Benglis's sculpture *Bone Ribbon* (2015–16), meanwhile, appears more ambivalent. Its twisting, opening form suggests, by turns, a phallus and a frail flower; its handmade paper skin is vulnerable, stretched over sharp chicken wire, punctured with openings and abrasions. A piss-yellow scrap juts out at the base. Benglis brings matter to the edge of abjection: *Bone Ribbon,* hovering between fragility and violence, feels like a punch to the gut.

Archey, who is also curatorial director at Düsseldorf's Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, a major German art collection, didn't write a conceptual text for the exhibition but a short poem, and this arrangement of works, while exploring power dynamics in boldly visceral terms, similarly captivates in its looseness and experimental nature. *The Shed* is part of the annual 'Curated by' festival organised by Vienna's commercial galleries, and its sketchy logic resonates with this year's theme of 'Fragmented Subjectivity'. Neither the concept nor the works seek wholeness or the visitor's undisrupted acceptance. Whereas Benglis's piece lays bare its own constructedness, the printer's registration marks that are usually cut from the fabric remain visible along the upper edge of Channer's works. The mechanical apparatus of *Beast* is likewise integral to its presentation, while Bernstein's unframed painting refuses illusionism: the heavy linen of the picture support drapes onto the gallery floor as an installation in its own right. What remains is not coherence but vibration – an uneasy resonance that insists on the necessity of loose ends.

Ramona Heinlein



Nina Beier, *Beast*, 2024, mechanical bull, plastic jugs and breast milk substitute, 165 × 70 × 170 cm (bull), 50 × 50 × 50 cm (remote, connected to bull by wire). Photo: Kunst-dokumentation.com. Courtesy the artist and Croy Nielsen, Vienna

Jyll Bradley *Running and Returning*

The Box, Plymouth 5 April – 2 November

At the centre of Jyll Bradley's retrospective, in The Box's annex gallery, a former church, is the sculpture *Running and Returning* (2025). On a wide, low white plinth are sheets of plexiglass, coated with iridescent dichroic film, each around a metre high, standing upright and arranged in chevronlike groups that follow each other in a circular formation, each panel attached to its neighbour through an odd arrangement of metal bars and hoops. Spotlit, it dazzles – deep purples, acid greens, lemon yellow, hot orange, emerald blue – its colours intermingle, reflect, a kaleidoscopelike fugue of colour into which one's gaze is drawn and gets lost.

If *Running and Returning* is emblematic of Jyll Bradley's three decades of work, it's not because Bradley has always worked in this postminimalist, abstract sculptural idiom. There are other works like this, made of similar materials – fluorescent plexiglass, mirrored acrylic, timber, steel – but there are also older photographic works, of other people, friends, collaborators, and of Bradley herself. What binds them is an attention to light, and through it what might be described as something like the euphoria of the everyday: ordinary things and moments that Bradley manages to make transcend themselves.

That celebration of the everyday first appears in earlier lightbox works that involve the smiling faces of three young women. *Naming Spaces* (1989/2011) comprises two illuminated images of the three; lit as if outdoors, at night, blurred and shifted by the camera's movement, they grin at us. Superimposed across each image are passages from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27): a moment in the first volume, *Swann's Way* (1913), in which the narrator recalls the excitement of attending the theatre. It's an odd combination, until one allows the nostalgic tone of the text to seep into the images of the women, emotional closeness and historical distance in poised balance. Alongside each lightbox, propped against the wall, is a simple sheet of powder-coated white aluminium, in the cool sheen of which one picks up, as if seen through a fog or heavy snow, the reflections of the other lit-up image.

This subtle play of memory and intimacy, of distance, loss and closeness, finds its physical form in these devices of blurring and merging. Bradley, born in Kent, then adopted, a gay woman headed to art school in London during the mid-1980s (a biography partly treated in the video *M.R.*, 2021, projected nearby), pulls questions of subjectivity, identity and sexuality in and out of focus in these works. If there is a politics of gender here, it's mobile and shifting: in the central, smaller space are largescale self-portraits, which Bradley took in 1987 but never presented until the 2020s. In one monochrome, Bradley is seen from the back, wearing a corduroy jacket, the focus on her cropped hair and the nape of her neck (*Self-Portrait 1987–2023*, 2023). Those in colour are of her dressed up in Elizabethan garb, acting out Virginia Woolf's sex-changing and gender-shifting character Orlando (*Self-Portrait as Orlando 1987–2024*, 2024). Again, Bradley looks away from us, the lighting of the room – a suburban living room maybe – glows with a warm, diffuse light that escapes through the closed curtains. There's a gentle introspection at work here, about privacy and self-possession, directed away from being fixed by one's own image.

But though these portraits are a denial of easy identification, hung alongside and in the context of Bradley's abstract sculptures, one realises that there's a further layer to Bradley's reflections on selfhood, to do with a kind of disappearance, or dissolution. The wall-mounted *Grafts* (2023), vertical, person-height constructions of strips of luminous plexiglass, mirror and wood, draw you to find your own reflection moving within the illusory inner space of their glittering, interlocking planes. What's at stake is a sort of reciprocity, between object and viewer, but this extends as a metaphor for the human relationships found in her other works.

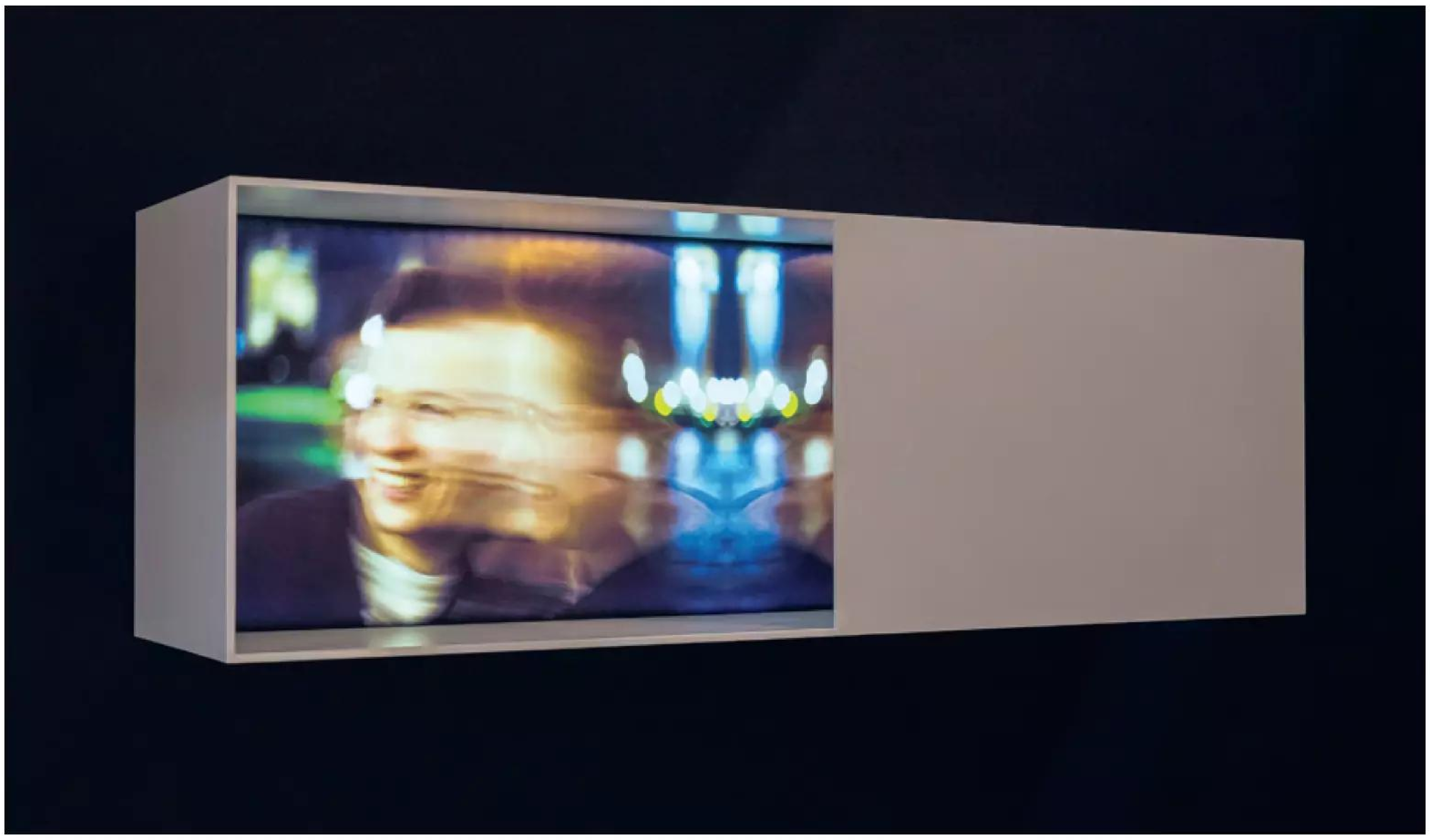
Bradley's *Grafts* is a gentle rebuke to the hardness and opacity of minimalist sculpture, and while gendered interpretations of these differences have their place, what *Grafts* most speaks to is a sentiment of hospitality and openness. That's perhaps most in evidence in Bradley's extraordinary sculptural-architectural structure *The Hop*, first presented outside London's Hayward Gallery in 2022, here in a smaller rendition occupying the square in front of the church. A structure of timber limbs that rise and angle out to create a pavilion of arcades, each column finned with a sequence of bright lime-green or deep blue plexiglass, *The Hop* is everything its surroundings are not – seemingly weightless, translucent, full of constantly changing geometry, offering play without necessity.

Though it looks like an homage to modernism (Bradley's drawings in the show make similar nods to constructivism and De Stijl), *The Hop* owes its form to agricultural life, to the hop rigs of rural Kent, while the curled steel clips of *Running and Returning* are copies of the kind used to assemble horticultural cloches. Indeed horticulture is the subject of other works here, including largescale photographs from Bradley's 2008 project and book *Mr Roscoe's Garden*, a social history of Liverpool's historical botanical garden. The public botanical garden is long gone, shut acrimoniously by the city council during the 1980s, but Bradley instead focused on those people who continue to care for this rare botanical collection. What ultimately ties the disparate strands of Bradley's work together is the artist's commitment to a politics of mutual recognition – both social and personal – in which one isn't defined by an immobile and impervious sense of one's own identity, but by the relationships that one cultivates, with everything, and everyone else.

J.J. Charlesworth

facing page, top
estherandamanda, 2013, mixed media, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist

facing page, bottom
Self-Portrait in Greenhouse Doorway, 1987, 35mm photograph.
Courtesy the artist



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William Kentridge *Pensieri Fuggitivi (Fugitive Thoughts)*

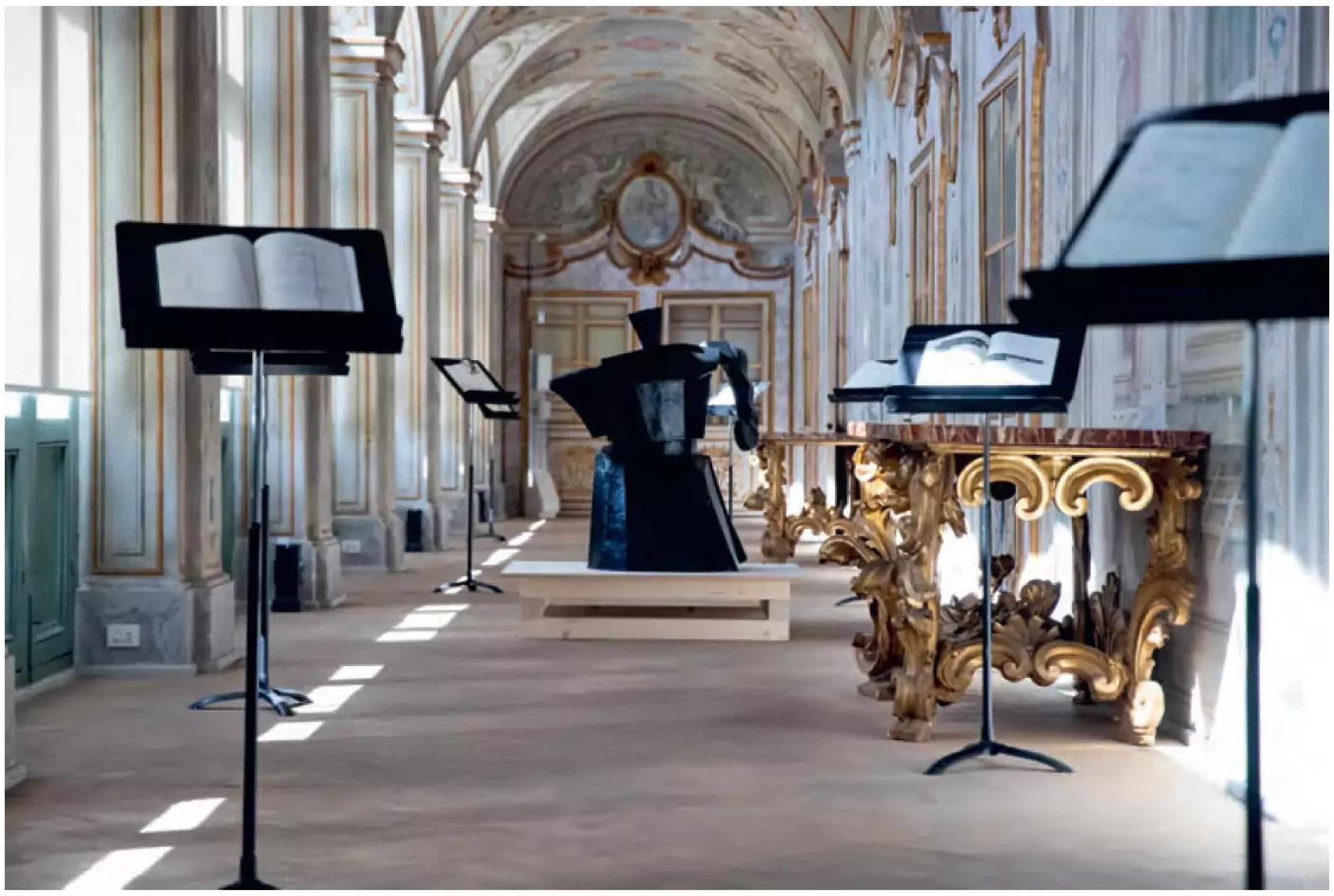
Palazzo Collicola, Spoleto 28 June – 2 November

The first floor of the eighteenth-century Palazzo Collicola presents a curatorial challenge. The rooms are heavy with the history of the noble Umbrian family whose countless paintings, portraits and precious belongings adorn this former residence, and nothing can be nailed or screwed to the walls and floors. Thus, William Kentridge's series *Blue Rubrics* (2019) – framed works featuring maxims declared loudly in bright blue lapis lazuli watercolours, painted onto old logbook pages from the former Royal Observatory, Cape of Good Hope – is mounted on simple plywood stands, which face in multiple directions. The effect is captivating, lending a choral dimension to statements like *To What End*, *God's Opinion is Unknown* or, my favourite, *Let us try for once not to be right*. To the left is the bronze sculpture *Apron* (2021), a surreal anthropomorphic apron-wearing megaphone painted black. Together, they set the stage for an exhibition spanning the prolific South African artist's last two decades: drawings, animations, prints, sculptures, tapestries and notebooks. It is as much about Kentridge's creative and conceptual process as about how we make sense of an increasingly polarised world.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the centrepiece video *Fugitive Words* (2024). Scored to Beethoven's Piano Trio, Op 97 (1811), it guides us through the artist's mind at work, by way of his studio notebook of charcoal drawings, collages and notes. Kentridge's animation technique is immediately recognisable, and hypnotic. In succession, surrounded by his worktable's range of charcoal sticks, pencils, triangular rulers and scissors, single images are drawn and redrawn – a tree unfurling from a chopped tree trunk, charcoal dust turning into tiny birds that fly across his notebook and beyond, scribbly fragments transforming into maps and landscapes. Erasure is integral here, resulting in a slow process indeed; a minute of animation typically takes the artist several weeks to complete. Charcoal, relatedly, is essential too: easily rubbed off, it can be quickly altered, reflecting the speed and provisionality of thinking, but also the past that always leaves a trace. The inherent messiness that is a trademark of Kentridge's animations is clearly a disavowal of all notions of 'truth' and 'purity' often wielded by authoritarians.

Throughout the show, we see Kentridge's interest in cross-fertilising mediums, from sculpture to opera – the artist was in town for Spoleto's annual Festival dei Due Mondi with his chamber opera *The Great Yes, The Great No* (2024) – and range of references. The nose has been a signature Kentridge theme since his 2010 opera production *The Nose*, inspired in part by Nikolai Gogol's 1836 satirical short story, and Shostakovich's 1930 operatic version, about a man's attempts to find his missing snout. In *Untitled VIII (Nose on horseback)* (2007), the pompous nose assumes an absurd Napoleonesque stance astride a horse, the monumentality of his pose undercut by the sculpture's small (82 cm high) dimensions in a brilliantly simple evisceration of authoritarian aspirations. Elsewhere, faithful printed replicas of 30 of Kentridge's notebooks are displayed throughout the gallery floor, propped open on music stands so viewers can browse (*Studio Notebooks [History on One Leg]*, 2024). They are repositories of everything: poems by favourite authors, measurements of works or sets, recordings of events or thoughts, drawings, sketches, collages. Together, they demonstrate how we make sense of the world through the metaphorical collages that make up our lives: our own histories, memories, prejudices, readings, headlines, conversations. In a time when everyone appears steadfast in speaking their 'truths', Kentridge's work continues, wholly refreshingly, to refuse didacticism, reminding us that so much of what is presented as objective is in fact quite the opposite.

Ana Vukadin



Pensieri Fuggitivi (Fugitive Thoughts), 2025 (installation view). Photo: Giuliano Vaccai. Courtesy the artist and Lia Rumma Gallery, Milan & Naples

Viaje a la luna

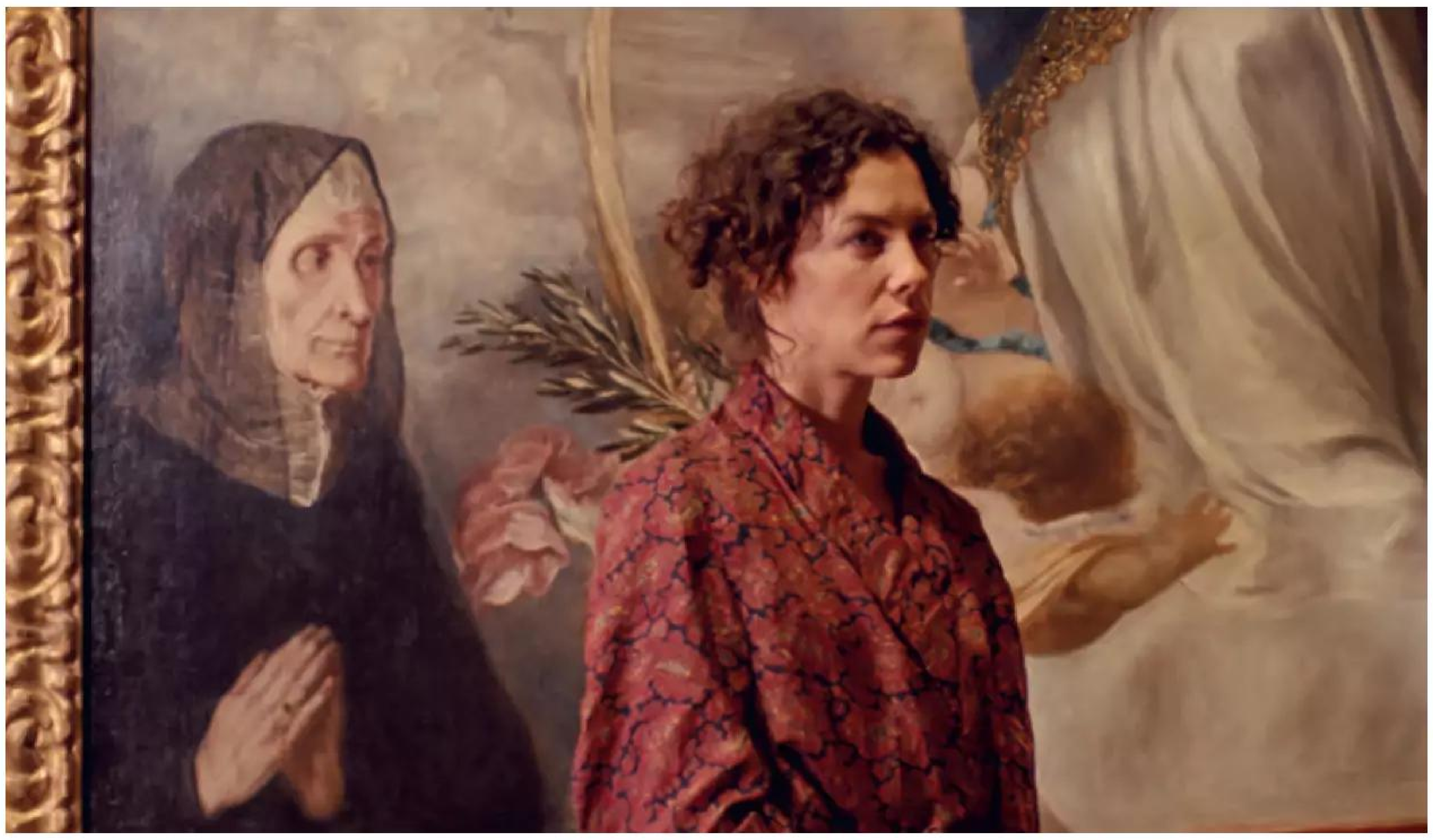
CCA *Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco 12 June – 11 October*

Flame-warped pots and pans are suspended along a length of steel cable that trails from an upper terrace to the bare concrete courtyard of the California College of the Arts below. In the school's eerie, late-summer vacancy, the only sound is a faint patter as droplets of what the checklist tells us is diluted artificial saliva trickle down the sculpture's pocked, distorted surfaces and are whipped into the air. The work, Tania Pérez Córdova's *Protest* (2025), alludes to *cacerolazo*, a form of demonstration in which participants bang kitchenware to express political discontent. Catching brisk coastal winds in their contours, the melting metal shapes toss violently against their restraint, tacitly commenting on the contemporary rise of censorship and authoritarian government. Wordlessly, the work sets the stage for the atmospheric malaise that pervades *Viaje a la luna* (A Trip to the Moon), an exhibition featuring 13 artists that responds to the eponymous unrealised 1929 filmscript by Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca.

Lorca drafted *Viaje a la luna* in one afternoon during a nine-month stay in New York. Its surreal, allegorical images are redolent of dread and desire – a smothered bird, slamming doors, a Black boy vomiting, a white bed – the text abstracts social and personal repressions that Lorca observed and experienced during his sojourn in a strange land. After protracted filming, production was abandoned following Lorca's premature death, in 1936, at the hands of Spanish nationalists. Fittingly, Lorca's works in the show are latent with ghostly presences. The wavering lines of his ink and graphite drawing *Muerte de Santa Rodegunda, Nueva York* (Death of St Radegund, New York, 1929) depict a spectral figure with two hooplike heads and mandorla eyes vomiting and defecating in the throes of death.

Viaje a la luna plays on uncanny doublings that tease ideas of originality, absence and recurrence, reaching beyond the original script to consider parallels between Lorca's time and our own. Writing in the aftermath of the stock-market crash of 1929, Lorca's view on industry was dim; of Wall Street, he wrote, 'rivers of gold flow there from all over the earth, and death comes with it'. Several works consider the impact of technological transformation. In Lola Álvarez Bravo's photomontage *Computadora I* (Computer I, c. 1954), two farmers are dwarfed by a spiring accumulation of calculators, switchboards and electrically augmented brains – suggesting the displacement of human labour by automation. This tension is latent in Nina Canell's dynamic sculpture *Tectonic Tender* (2023), in which a glass dish is balanced between two conveyors, positioned side by side with steel rollers turning towards each other. Relying on these equal, opposing forces, the plate pitches erratically, never quite overstepping the tolerance threshold that sustains its precarious equilibrium.

Viaje a la luna is haunted by the past but also, as writes curator Diego Villalobos, by the possibility that history might recur. Extending the theme of historic cycles, Rosalind Nashashibi's three-part film *Denim Sky* (2018–22) draws on a story by Ursula K. Le Guin in which cosmonauts collectively weave a narrative that alters the linearity of time. Over the course of four years, as the artist's friends, family and community strive fitfully to understand one another across barriers of age and distance, we see disjointed scenes: thighs sunlit in a front passenger seat; sped-up film of an empty bench against a mist-laden horizon, figures walking jerkily by. These are sanguine alternatives to Lorca's claustrophobic imagery, but they likewise cultivate the mystical and otherworldly in the real and intimate difficulties of building a world together. Subtly, in an imagistic accumulation to rival Lorca's script, the exhibition takes its readings and tells us what is plain as day: the trouble's already begun. *Nicole Kaack*



Rosalind Nashashibi, *Denim Sky* (still), 2018–22,
single-channel 16mm film transferred to HD video, colour, sound, 67 min.
Courtesy the artist and Grimm Gallery, London

Wohnkomplex: Art and Life in Plattenbau

Das Minsk, Potsdam 6 September – 8 February

Plattenbau – literally 'panel building' – is a term synonymous with the mostly highrise prefabricated estates that were thrown up en masse across East Germany from the 1960s onwards as an efficient, inexpensive solution to housing and a planned collectivisation of the people. In 1990, the German Democratic Republic collapsed, and alongside it the ideological and economic systems underpinning the *Plattenbau*, but many buildings remain, often renovated or repurposed yet resonant of their past. As vessels for collective memory, projection and transformation, they are naturally interesting to artists. *Wohnkomplex* (Living Complex) leans into its title's ambiguity, with some 50 artworks by 24 artists (nearly all of whom are from or lived in East Germany), dating from the 1970s to the present. Within the boundary of an almost exclusively white perspective – which I will return to – it presents a compellingly nuanced picture of life within the 'complex'.

Wolfram Ebersbach's 1974 oil painting *Hausfassade* captures expressions of individualism within the strict architecture; balconies host a tomato plant, parasols, TV antennae that might catch signals from the West, a figure smoking. Its dimensions (99×85 cm) and white frame imply observing through a window from an identical building opposite. Even constricted by this view, the blue sky reflected in the upper windows evokes an ambivalence verging on optimism. Starkly contradicting this vision are subversive works on paper by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, who used the typewriter of her profession as an office manager to stamp out *Kuben, Kästen, Käfige* (Cubes, Boxes, Cages), as a 1979 work on paper is emphatically titled, that recalls the aesthetics of the *Plattenbau* and the administration behind it.

For an exhibition about such a seemingly banal form of architecture, there is an urgent, emotional charge in Sabine Moritz's *Lobeda* (1991–94), detailed, childlike drawings from memory of the estate where she lived before emigrating to West Germany, and surreal encounters to be had in Peter Herrmann's primitively painted *Kühe vor dem neuen Tor* (Cows in Front of the New Gate, 1979), which humorously drops a *Plattenbau* into a field of nonplussed cows – as the housing plan extended to agricultural communities – or Harald Metzkes's Fellini-esque oil on canvas, *Aufbau von Marzahn* (Building Marzahn, 1984), where an estate looms behind figures engaged in acrobatics.

Although the infamous 'baseball bat years' of racist violence that occurred during the 1990s after the GDR's fall is exposed in Henrike Naumann's *Triangular Stories (Amnesia & Terror)* (2012), an installation that posits hedonistic club culture and neo-Nazi terror as two paths of appeal to estate-dwelling teenagers, no works speak for the people on the receiving end of this violence or its historical intersections. (Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani's film *Klub 2000 – rom, paris, marzahn*, 1998, edges towards it, as two ravers scope out Marzahn to start a new venue and weigh up the proximity to skinheads.) During the GDR era, for example, the egalitarian promise of the *Plattenbau* rarely extended to contract workers from abroad, often housed in segregated estates, subjected to curfews and family separation, and threatened with deportation in the case of pregnancy – a history recently examined by Vietnam-born Sung Tieu in her exhibition at Berlin's Kunst-Werke. Today, *Plattenbau* estates are often cited as far-right strongholds, while housing immigrants unable to rent elsewhere by systematic racism. To leave this underexplored feels amiss. This survey successfully launches its subject into the artistic conversation, but we need a broader scope to tackle questions that the *Plattenbau* triggers about living together in Germany, in all its complexity. *Phoebe Blatton*

Seiichi Furuya, *Berlin-Ost 1985*, 1985.
Photo: Christine Furuya-Gössler. © the artist.
Courtesy Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin

Takako Yamaguchi

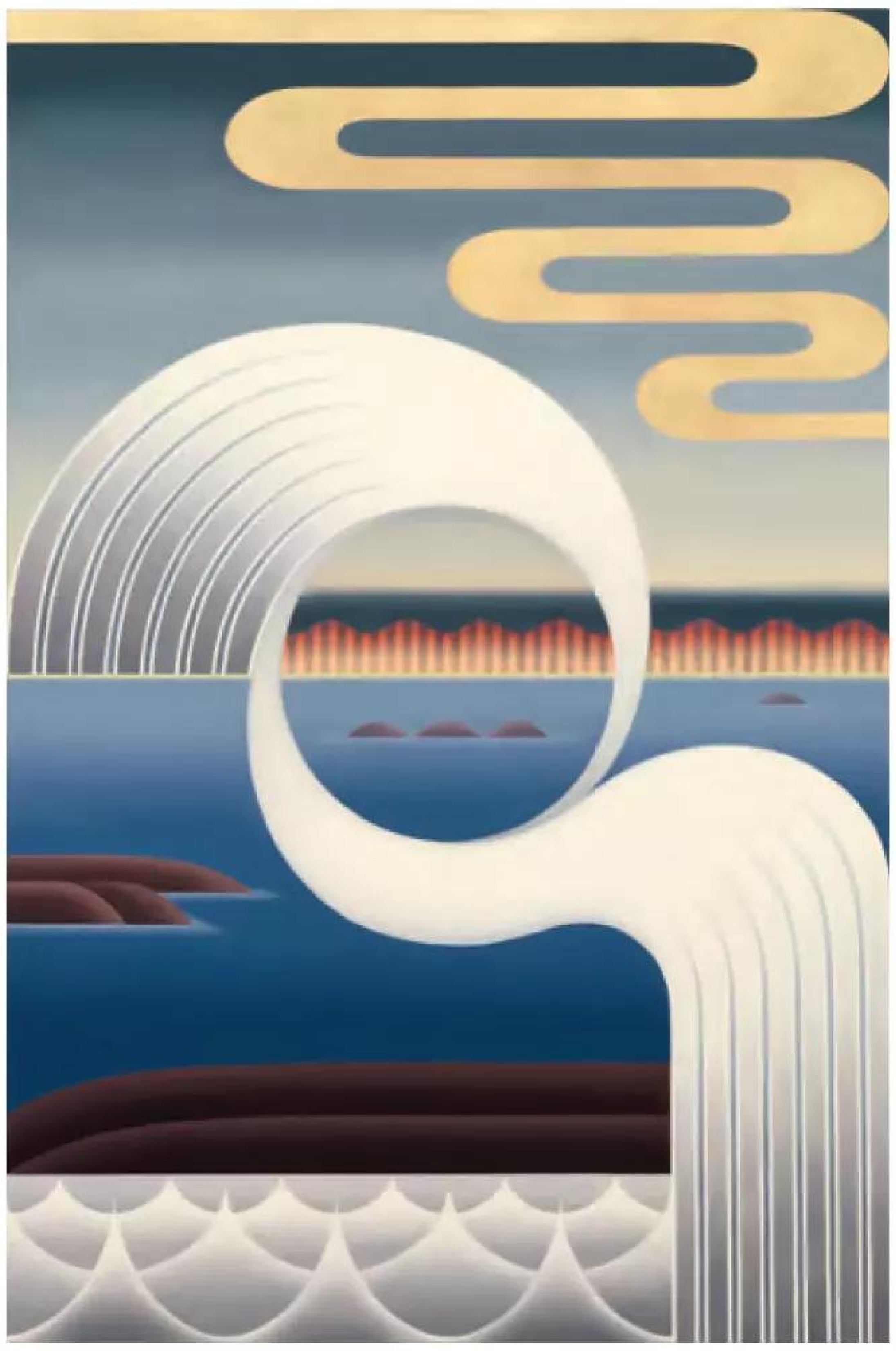
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles 29 June – 4 January

For the past half-century, artist Takako Yamaguchi has combined diverse motifs to form paintings that subtly critique art-historical precedents, from Ancient Greek architectural tropes and modernist grids to Japanese woodblock print styles and midcentury geometric abstraction – to name a few. In this show of recent, near-abstract seascapes, Yamaguchi is positioned as a radical appropriation artist committed to evading what she calls, in one exhibition text, the 'then mainstream positions… [of] "the tough", "the ugly", "the angry"' in twentieth-century art, a phrasing that takes aim at the twentieth century's Western, male avant-garde – and its unfeeling aesthetics, often derived from the harsh processes of mass production in both material and look. Yamaguchi reconfigures the trenchant symbols of her predecessors to form lush, evocative landscapes, rewarding curious viewers with immersive depictions that transcend her references.

Residue (2023) depicts what appears, at first glance, to be a view of the ocean, but closer inspection reveals stencilled vertical bars and blue-white colour gradients in the sky and on the horizon, recalling the geometric abstraction of Frank Stella or Ellsworth Kelly. When Yamaguchi began making art during the early 1970s, grids, lines and colour gradients were the beginning and end of modern art; here, they're just a part of the scenery. In *Accomplice* (2025), Yamaguchi reaches further into Western cultural memory: white shapes reminiscent of adornments on Greek ionic columns swirl above a rocky sea. But while many of her forebears eschewed figuration and decorative touches, Yamaguchi embraces their inevitability and slyly suggests how some of her peers' now-outdated ideals foreclosed the more energetic expressions possible in her own artwork.

Included in Yamaguchi's paintings are depictions of weavings, stitches and braided patterns – symbols of decorative crafts typically practised by women and historically dismissed in the artworld. These shapes appear alternately confining and liberatory; where the swirling decorations derived from Greek columns burst through Yamaguchi's flattened planes, in *Wrapper* (2023) and *Stitch* (2023), interlocking white chains press down on horizon lines, their creamy ties stretched taut across each canvas. In *Procession* (2024), however, a knotted hair braid manages to break out of the canvas's blue sky, its strands descending into straight white channels like rainfall. The storm evokes both the severe shapes of Minimalist sculptors like Dan Flavin or Donald Judd and the loose threads of an unfinished scarf or sweater.

At times, Yamaguchi feels stringently postmodernist, positing herself as a critical collagist of past art. But a more ecstatic thread runs throughout her work. *Plenum* (2024) features a yellow orb that births white spiralling tendrils that twirl like hair or DNA strands, coming to rest in a vast navy sea. In *Trap* (2024), ebullient tendrils of gold leaf and dark grey clouds conjure visions of posthurricane sunsets or a stormy daybreak. Within her rigorous designs – Yamaguchi often appears to employ stencils, and marks of her gestural brushwork are hard to come by – the artist also locates a kind of sublime, crafting images that look more akin to the mystical, whirligig expressions of Hilma af Klint or Agnes Pelton's transcendental, southwestern-hued scenes than to the 'tough' and 'ugly' pretences of her male rivals. While not explicitly feminist, Yamaguchi hits these men where it hurts: their art. *Claudia Ross*



Trap, 2024, oil and metal leaf on canvas,
152 × 102 cm. Photo: Jeff McLane.
Courtesy The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

41st EVA International

Various venues, Limerick   29 August – 26 October

The title of Eszter Szakács's guest curator programme for the 41st edition of EVA International – *It Takes a Village* – risks setting a tone of hokey, barn-raising positivity. The phrase originated, some say, as an African proverb: a time-honoured adage, espousing community participation in childrearing. Put to use, however, as the headline theme of Ireland's Limerick-based biennial, this familiar slogan might make a corny kind of sense: declaring, within the frequently unforgiving public context of a citywide exhibition, an upbeat, come-together ethos.

Accordingly, Hungarian curator Szakács – a seasoned researcher on models of solidarity through her work with the Off-Biennale Budapest, the Kyiv Biennial and more besides – invokes the 'village' axiom to proclaim belief in art as a socially energising, cocreative endeavour. Unifying moments of political activism or public assembly thus feature prominently within Szakács's sensibly scaled guest programme (23 artists, collectives or partnerships, across 13 relatively central locations). In collaboration with local fabricators, ruangrupa member Reza Afisina presents, for instance, *to have heart like Grass, holds up and stand fast* (2025), a modest pop-up and pack-away platform for community-led performances and projects: a portable structure, barely the size of an eight-seater dining table, made to host an open-call schedule of inclusive creative work. Ana Bravo-Pérez's *If we remain silent* (2023), at Limerick City Gallery of Art, is a beautifully fragile analogue-film installation, a Rosa Barba-like kinetic sculpture made from extending loops of filmstrip, showing, on projection screens framed with intricate toquilla straw weavings, ten feminist campaigners staging protest-performances outside the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Wall-graphs, threaded with loops of film, map the context: women's role in resisting ecological destruction and lasting colonial exploitation in 'Abya Yala' (an Indigenous term for much of South and Central America). Also at the City Gallery, Yazan Khalili displays a collection of 28 football-style scarves, entitled *All The Languages of Our Tongues* (2025), each one emblazoned with a distinct, but incomplete, text ('Our bones like a beam of light that is' / 'Growing from the soil to what is left of…'). If worn together by a gathered body of people, the individual lines link up as a coherent poem: a hopeful paean to the promise of solidarity. (Proceeds on sales of the scarves will be distributed to grassroots organisations in Palestine.)

These and a number of other geographically diverse contributors (such as Family Connection from the Caribbean island of Curaçao, and the damdam 'collective of collectives', a further offshoot of ruangrupa's Indonesian-born 'Lumbung' initiative), press the case for art's civic significance in terms of cooperative effort and shared achievement. And yet, paradoxically, what often best distinguishes Szakács' selections – and enriches the guiding concept – is uneasiness with confident expressions of group identity.

Eoghan Ryan's agitated video *Carceral Jigs* (2025), a standalone, single-screen installation at the small terraced-house venue Starling, jump-cuts between footage spotlighting contradictory visions of Irish national experience. This deliberately jarring miscellany includes:

Eoghan Ryan, *Carceral Jigs*, 2025 (installation view).
Courtesy the artist and EVA International, Limerick

digitally animated recreations of a popular children's TV character from the 1970s and 80s (an awful squealing red-haired puppet who addressed audiences both in English and Irish); fragmented, sinister, up-close sequences documenting recent far-right anti-immigrant protests in Dublin; and archival clips of the former Mosney holiday camp north of the capital, an Irish version of Britain's Butlin's resorts, repurposed over recent decades as a centre of 'direct provision' for international-protection applicants. (A widely criticised, almost prison-like paradigm of asylum support, hindering proper integration of resident families into the wider society.) More meditative but equally charged with nationalist complexities, Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty's US-focused *indirect fire* (2025) combines slo-mo shots of dazzling Inauguration Day firework displays on one screen with, on another, fragments of text drawn from conversations about environmental damage with the 'New River Valley Citizens for Arsenal Accountability', a cohort of activists based in Radford, Virginia – home to America's largest munitions factory and its preeminent pyrotechnics company.

Clinton and Moriarty wear their extensive research lightly, elegantly pairing extravagant demonstrations of bombastic patriotism with elliptical allusions to alternative, resistant solidarities. Alongside *indirect fire* at the One Opera Square venue (one of several nongallery spaces adapted for the EVA exhibition), other tidily self-contained installations further nuance the 'village' narrative. Through the production of small books, delicate ceramic figurines and a spoken-word video-performance, for example, Gideon Horváth's *The Most Dangerous Person* (2025) elaborates on interviews with representatives of sexual minorities in small-town Hungary: dialogues dealing with everyday fears triggered by stigmatising, authoritarian government policies. (From one of the printed interviews: 'Do you ever get explicit attacks or insults here in the countryside?', 'Of course... because I'm not getting married, because I'm not having children.') Village life, as described through Horváth's one-to-one encounters, is manifestly, for some, more threatening than nurturing.

Szakács's EVA programme is bookended by a busy timetable of live events, enhanced by institutional collaborations (among them *Bíodh Orm Anocht* [Be With Me Tonight], an involving four-artist reflection on folk knowledge at Ormston House) and supplemented by a modest array of additional 'platform commissions' (selected by Iarlaith Ní Fheorais and Roy Claire Potter). Loosely themed around the subject of 'access', the latter include *Call Centre Sound Structure*, a project by Éireann and I (Joselle Ntumba and Beulah Ezeugo) that gives fresh-feeling voice to accounts of identity and marginalisation, reimagining the dreary routine of a 'customer care' conversation – a drag for the caller, a deadening necessity for the call-centre worker – as a potential occasion of intimate communication. Headphones on, visitors sink into beanbags, listening to challenging stories of Black life in present-day Ireland. It's a neat, testing form-and-content contrast (intended or not). On the one hand, we participate in the convivial comforts of a contemplative artwork, with its invitation to be at rest, to join with others in the shared activity of paying meaningful attention. On the other, we hear chronicles of pressure and precarity in the daily lives of migrant workers – lightly fictionalised perspectives on the many enduring barriers to civic, national, cultural or economic 'access'. In this productively contradictory way, perhaps, Éireann and I's work typifies something of the broader outlook and curatorial ethos of EVA 2025: staging a welcoming situation to address – or discover, or debate – uncomfortable complexities of social connection and disconnection, inclusion and exclusion. *Declan Long*

Gideon Horváth, *The Most Dangerous Person*, 2025 (installation view).
Courtesy the artist and EVA International, Limerick

Aubrey Levinthal *Mirror Matter*

Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh 28 June – 13 September

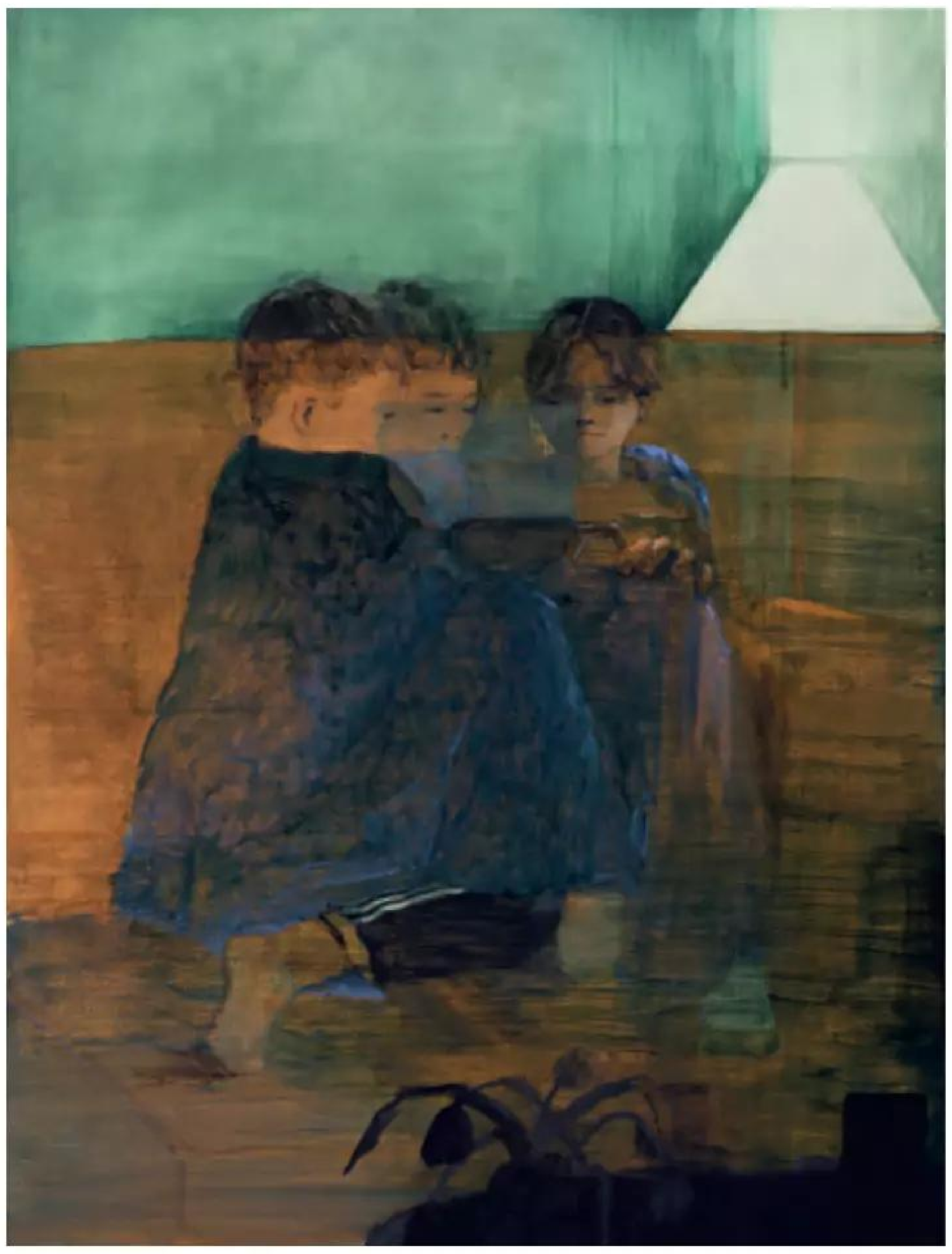
A key motif of *Mirror Matter*, Philadelphia-based painter Aubrey Levinthal's largest UK exhibition to date, is the humble Tupperware. In one portrait a tub of plain penne is held by a woman slouching in a chair before an unfinished canvas, her large eyes lost in thought. The last strand of spaghetti curls limply in its transparent container at the edge of the still-life *Studio desk* (2025). Levinthal's hazy, diaristic paintings document the objects, relationships and routines that populate the unexceptional day-to-day life of a working artist. Lunch breaks, school runs, housework and daytrips are cast in a cool, melancholic palette as people with enlarged eyes and hands, including one figure with dark hair in a messy bun who might stand in for the artist, stare blankly ahead. Swathes of pale, dusty pinks and greyish greens set the dominant tone, while saturated bursts of colour, like the bright red jumper in *Sink Stomach* (2025), punctuate the subdued atmosphere.

Working primarily on panel, Levinthal's textures are dry and scratchy, with successive layers of oils thinned with solvents and scraped away with blades. Her wonky, multipoint perspectives give some of the paintings the playful angularity of a pop-up book, with objects painted face-on to the plane of the canvas, while surfaces like desks, tables, bedspreads and nightstands are stretched and flattened until they almost fill the frame. Figures can also be awkwardly foreshortened or placed at odds with their surroundings. The two women portrayed in side-profile in *Laps around the square* (2024) are imposed upon an aerial view of the drab winter park they stroll around. In the background, a person pushing a pram and another walking a dog are inexplicably seen from above.

Just as the Tupperware container reappears in various compositions, emptied and refilled as the days pass by, everyday objects recur across these interrelated works. A pair of red striped socks sported by the artist in *Lunch break* (2025) returns in *Worry Woman* (2025) strewn on the floor as the same figure lies half-asleep on top of the covers of a squared bedspread that fills most of the canvas. Cables and chargers are a continual presence, twisting through table legs and snaking out of frame. Levinthal is particularly drawn to transparent materials: glasses, bottles and plastic sandwich bags are almost imperceptibly differentiated from the murky surfaces they sit on. Other objects are wilfully ambiguous: the empty sink in *Sink Stomach* registers initially as a desktop computer, drawing links between domestic and administrative labour. Daubs of purple paint suggesting winter flowers double as crumpled wrappers in an overflowing rubbish bin.

Beneath the quirky experiments with perspective and colour, many of Levinthal's compositions hide a layer of existential ambivalence, especially in relation to work and motherhood. Absent, distracted expressions often appear on her characters' faces, like the commuter queuing outside a station at night in *Descending Subway (Stairs)* (2025). While the bodies of the three figures outside a school in *Drop-Off Women* (2025) overlap, their gazes run straight past each other in either steely camaraderie or mundane estrangement. *Couch (Three Boys)* (2025) is a unique work in the show, both for its single-point perspective, suggesting a maternal or protective gaze, and the intimate closeness of the three kids huddled under one blanket in their Adidas joggers and Nike T-shirts, absorbed by a screen shared between them. A square of purple light projects onto their placated, partially hidden faces. Slippery and translucent yet immediately familiar, Levinthal's paintings zone in on the present precisely at those moments when our attention starts to drift.

Gabriel Levine Brislin



Couch (Three Boys), 2025, oil on panel, 102 × 76 cm.
Photo: Neighboring States. © the artist.
Courtesy the artist and Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh

Trajal Harrell *the collection*

Artagon Pantin 4–6 September

Trajal Harrell's work is known for bringing contrasting dance traditions into dialogue in both theatrical and visual art contexts. The American choreographer's signature 2009 piece, *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church*, imagined a collaboration between the Harlem voguers and the postmodern choreographers of 1960s New York, and of late he's extended his cross-genre explorations to include butoh, the Japanese dance-theatre form characterised by themes of death, decay and regeneration. But at this year's Holland Festival Harrell revealed that he is closing this chapter of his work, and to mark the transition he premiered *the collection* at Paris's multidisciplinary Festival d'Automne. Comprising four vignettes, none longer than 30 minutes, it aimed to evoke the experimental energy of butoh founder Tatsumi Hijikata's Asubesutokan (Asbestos Hall), a studio in 1960s Tokyo where artists ate, slept, debated and created. Presented in the atrium of Artagon Pantin – a production space dedicated to supporting early-career artists – the evening had a DIY feel, emphasising the vitality of process over polished performance.

For the night's second work, *Arena* – performed by two female dancers, later repeated by a male duo – a chalk circle was drawn matter-of-factly on the floor, stools arranged around it for audience members. Harrell sat among them, bespectacled and earnestly scribbling in a notebook (writing feedback, or ideas for future explorations?) as his performers moved around the circumference, throwing salutelike gestures to the spectators that ranged from cheeky to confrontational. Against an eclectic score of haphazardly assembled tracks, they undressed and switched fashionable outfits – frequent costume changes between luxury-brand items are a Harrell hallmark – strutted with exaggerated, leg-flicking walks, and contorted bodies and expressions into awkward, grotesque configurations. Lips protruded, brows raised, eyes rolled back to create raw displays of emotion evoking tragic theatrical masks, or characters from a manga cartoon.

In contrast, *Five Friends in Five Acts* saw Harrell and longtime collaborator Perle Palombe switch between bizarre scenes – irreverently running, between each, to grab bites of salad and down champagne. The first part, in which they alternated laying colourful ribbons in a latticed pattern on the floor in some kind of game, was the most charming. Their intense concentration was quietly amusing, especially when they moved to dropping plates on top of the ribbons while trying not to smash them, childlike horror and disappointment flooding Harrell's face when his shattered.

Arena was supposedly inspired by the dealer and client in Bernard-Marie Koltès's 1985 play *In the Solitude of Cottonfields*, and by *Five Friends* a recent touring exhibition featuring work by Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, Merce Cunningham and John Cage. Yet it was the exaggerated emotionality embodied by Harrell and his dancers across *the collection* that was more visceral and affecting than any intellectual allusions. Witnessing such intense states can make a viewer feel less isolated in their own emotional extremes. That Harrell can suddenly switch from this into confident catwalklike struts speaks to the multiplicity of the human experience, as well as the strength many of us summon to control, and sometimes conceal, our inner worlds.

Proximity and informality are key. While Harrell has presented largescale works on major European stages – from London's Sadler's Wells to Berliner Festspiele – he began in intimate, gallery-style contexts like this one, where his work thrives. The 'scratch' vibe – short, digestible pieces, with viewers free to come and go, glasses of wine in hand – keeps the work approachable despite its three-hour duration. It also reflects Harrell's playfulness, his refusal to take himself too seriously. In *the collection*, bizarre, impulse-driven scenarios coexist without the pressure of dramaturgical logic: in *A Ghost Ballet*, for example, five dancers shift from waggling clothes-hangers at the audience like market hawkers to darting about in black-and-white sheets like Scooby-Doo ghouls. In a traditional theatre setting, I might have found the lack of narrative or thematic throughline frustrating. Here, though, I found myself chuckling along with the childlike playfulness and experimental energy. It's refreshing in a time when economic pressures often stifle the risks on which art depends.

Emily May

the collection, 2025 (performance view).
Photo: Corentin Le Guet. Courtesy the artist

Amy Sillman *Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32)*

Dia Bridgehampton 28 June – 25 May

Amy Sillman has been heralded as a feminist painter, her typically gestural, intuitive and unruly brushstrokes interpreted as traces of fraught intimacy, aborted memory and bodies adrift with violent eroticism. However, it is evident that a certain interpretive tendency attaches to Sillman and her women painter peers such as Laura Owens, Jacqueline Humphries and R. H. Quaytman, who have, alongside new developments in feminist and queer cultural theories, risen to prominence since the early 1990s with largescale works that meticulously think through the circulation and production of postmodern images and repressed histories.

Art historians and curators tend to frame these painters in clichés, presupposing that they take conceptual and formal cues from the unconscious, for instance, or that they delight in the spontaneous eruption of affect or are attuned to the vitality of matter. While these claims hold some truth, as seen in Sillman's earlier paintings that figure tragicomic sexual encounters, mythological scenography and abject confrontations with mortality, recent developments in Sillman's three-decade practice, characterised by the artist's nonhierarchical attitude towards materials, artistic movements and references, depart from a set of demanding questions irreducible to such theoretical frameworks: can painting achieve other forms of fluidity once it subjects free association to self-imposed restrictions? Can precision and control coexist with care and affection for more democratic modes of viewing and making sense? Can authorship exist in both singular and plural forms?

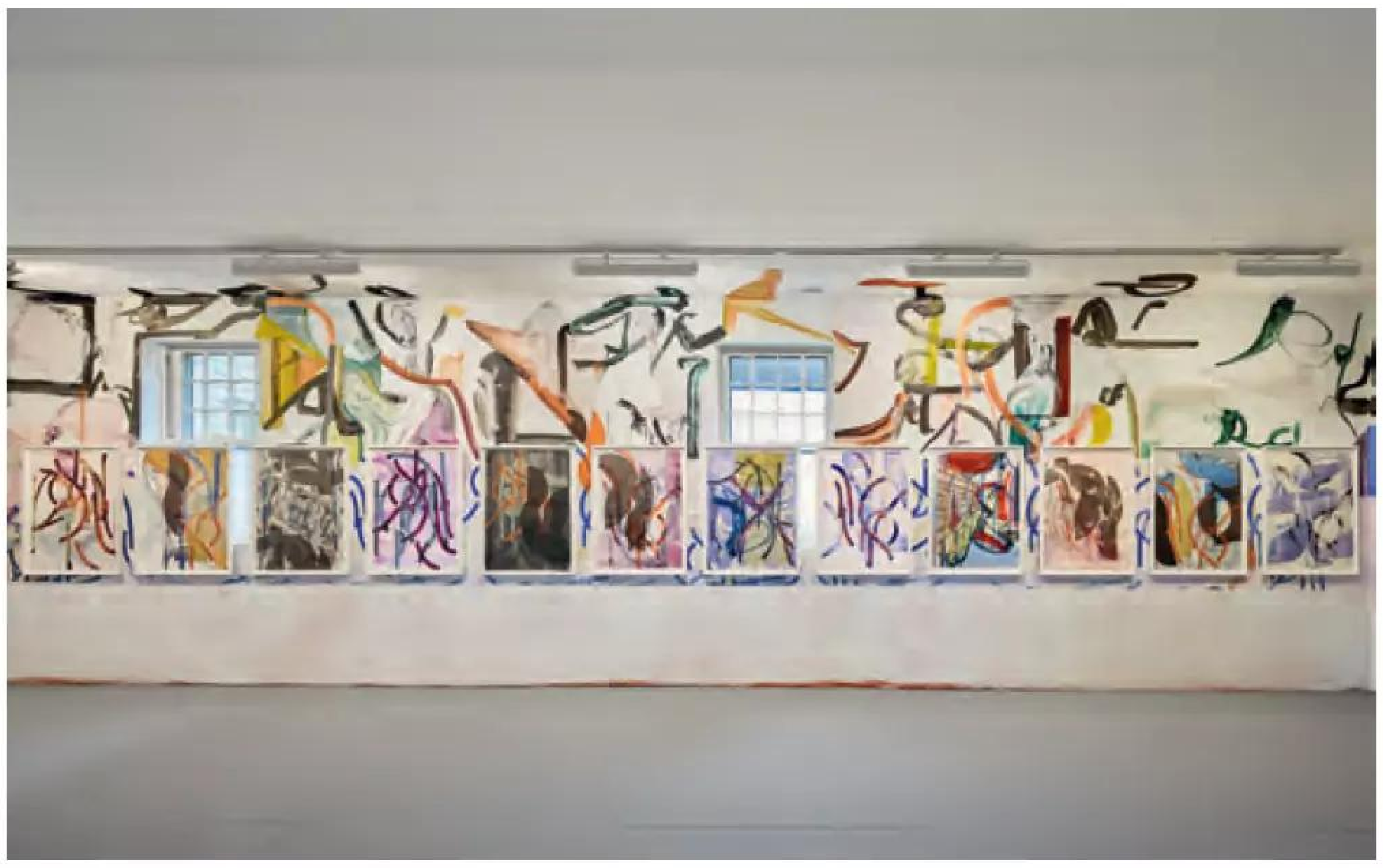
Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32) is conceived as one site-specific installation, consisting of a series of 32 framed and untitled monotypes, hung on gallery walls that are themselves host to improvised painting and screenprinting. The monotypes, which offer an interplay between image and asemic writing, deploy a small pool of forms, ranging from vertical, slightly zigzagging lines of various lengths and thickness to ovals of different sizes. In one, lines of burgundy and storm-cloud grey wiggle against a light pink backdrop. Another is filled with whirling bands of Persian blue and black. Sillman couples and decouples these shapes against hazy colour fields and seems to revel in her own mark-making processes, laying bare traces of production.

Printmaking can be unpredictable. These monotypes – produced during Sillman's residency at Two Palms, an organisation that supports the production of artists' prints and multiples – are irreproducible, full of chance and accident. Their surfaces, with the artist's investments and gestures scraped, reworked and repeated but never erased, allow for a multitude of traces to coexist. The multiplicity of scales and shapes is most prominent in the black-and-white screenprints on the north wall. These monochrome prints, with their shallow depth of field, recall a ruined facade but ultimately point to their own making, demonstrating Sillman's careful play with density, volume, definition and flatness, and how such play turns the painterly logic of time back on itself.

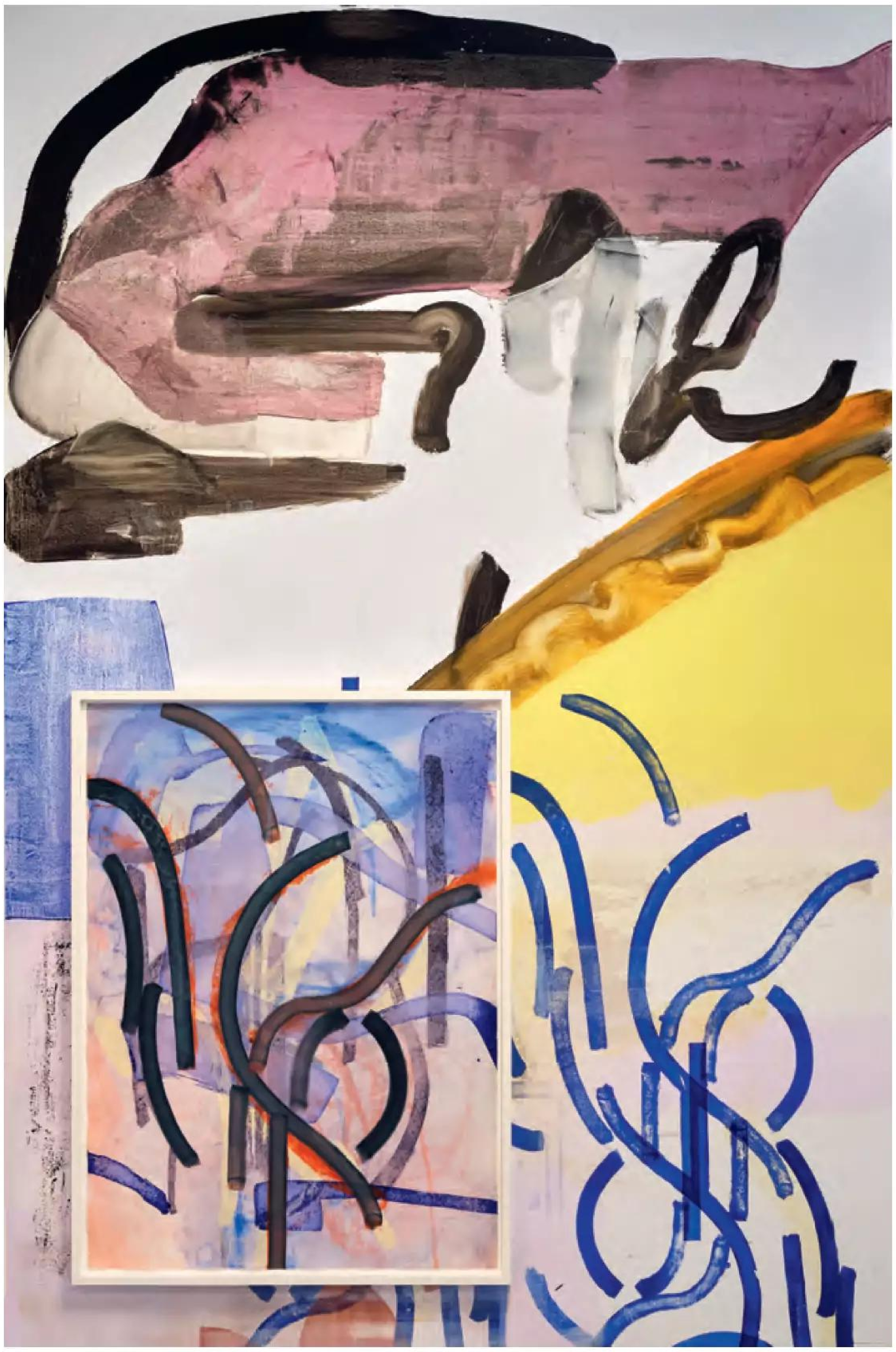
Around them, the painted and screenprinted walls appear at first as a ground of sketches, or a site of construction, that reveals the building blocks of the artist's monotypes. *Alternate Side* continues Sillman's problematising of painting as an autonomous object and closed field of operation. The south walls beam with quasi-Fauvist vibrancy, thanks to the artist's frenzied application of unconventional materials – like turmeric – using sponges and squeegees. The resulting shapes splinter and fuse; vaguely figurative but ultimately disturbed by Sillman's avoidance of direction and depth, they retreat into opacity and illegibility. The north walls see spatters, pulls and pours of ink that flow and wander into subdued lines of flight, loosely corresponding with the screenprints installed on them, which harbour more condensed forms and gestures.

Sillman resists the ontological and epistemological purity of painting, yet she ultimately isn't interested in easy ambiguity or ambivalence. Instead she rejoices in her environments and her influences, at every turn complicating these with an intentionally devised and imposed grammar and rules. Sillman sets up binary oppositions only to collapse the two in one operation of immanence and unpredictable order, one that measures the inexact borders between language and perception, cause and effect.

Qingyuan Deng



Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32), 2025 (installation view).
Photo: Don Stahl. © the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York, Brussels & Seoul



Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32), 2025 (installation view).
Photo: Don Stahl. © the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York, Brussels & Seoul

Sophy Rickett, Rut Blees Luxemburg *Stream*

Cob Gallery, London 10–27 September

Sophy Rickett was fresh out of art school when she realised the black-and-white photographic series *Pissing Women* (1995). It delivers on the promise of its title, comprising a trio of full-length portraits of Rickett and her friend and fellow flaneuse Rut Blees Luxemburg standing up to urinate against a series of symbolic London locations. In 1994, both women were working in the City of London, exploring the environment they worked in out of office hours. They dressed up in formal office wear and posed for each other, collaborating on both *Pissing Women* and Blees Luxemburg's own series *Chance Encounters* (1995).

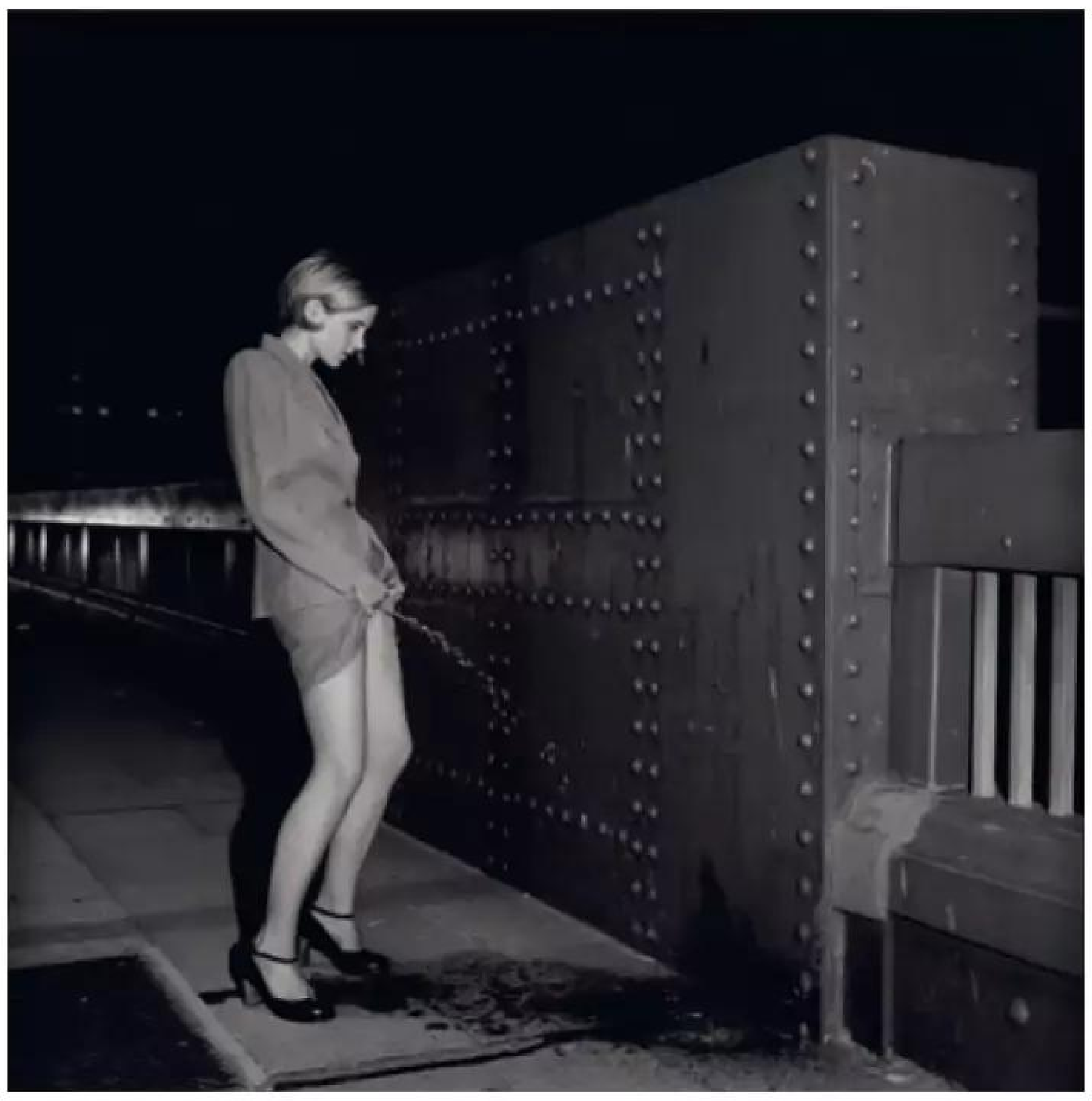
Rickett's series has just been published as an eponymous book, alongside a collection of essays, for which this show (a doubleheader with Blees Luxemburg) is a tie-in. As to why this particular moment has been chosen to revisit bodies of work created 30 years ago, we might point the finger at current nostalgia: in this case, for the 1990s, a period now being revised and repackaged for the twenty-first century. You can see the process at work in the essays on Rickett's pictures, which for the most part consider them, often in rather one-dimensional terms, as contemporary emblems of female empowerment. That's not an entirely worthless reading, but it is a reductive one.

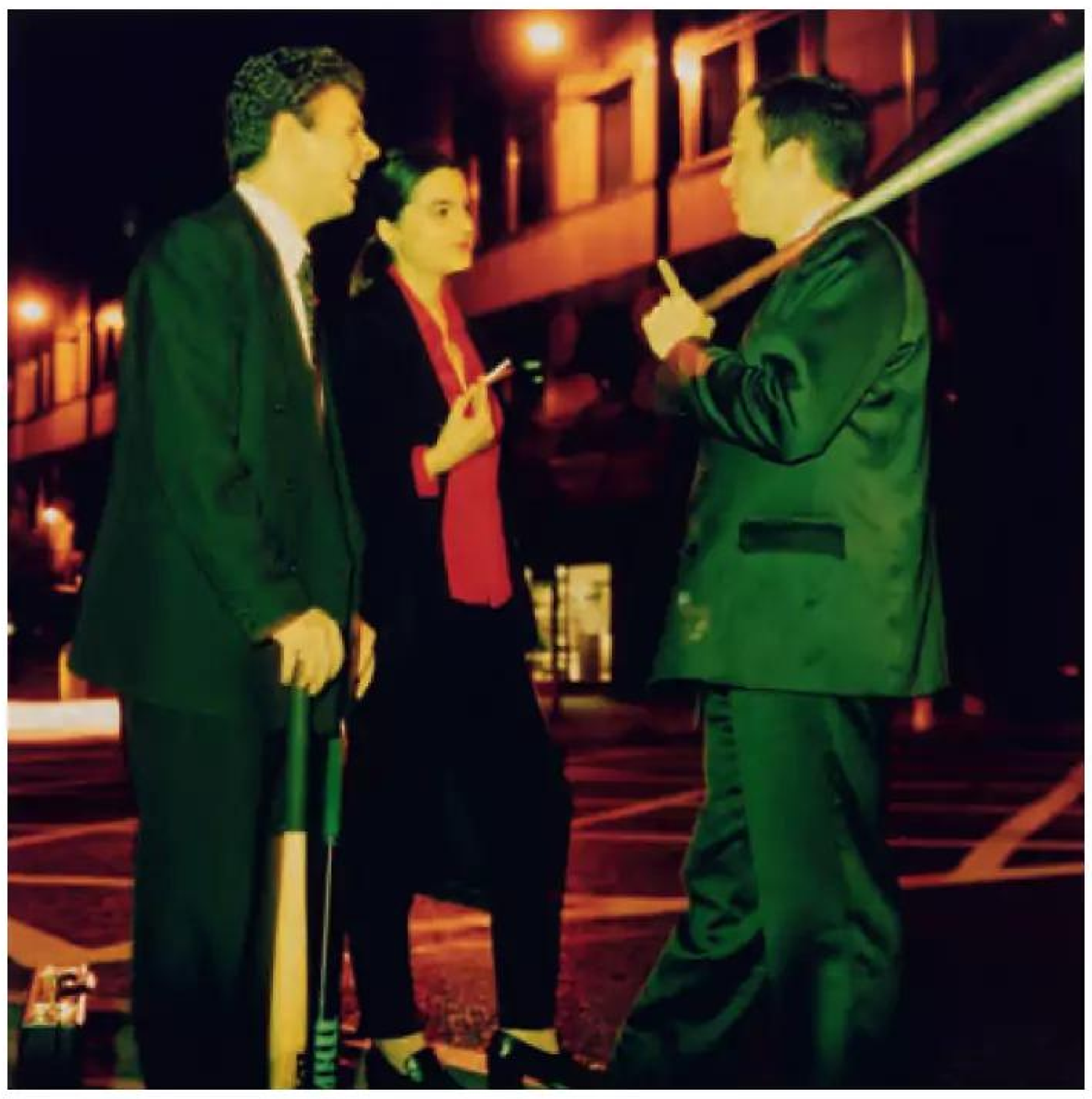
The artist's targets were macho structures, certainly, but precisely defined ones: the service economy, as represented by a City office block clad in reflective black marble; and the security state that safeguarded it, represented by a satellite listening station at Silvertown and the then-recently-completed headquarters of MI6, looming above Rickett in the background beyond Vauxhall Bridge. You're reminded of Michel de Certeau writing about seeing Manhattan from atop the World Trade Center (in his essay 'Walking in the City', published in English in 1984), or Patrick Keiller's film *London* (1994). Similarly, Rickett's pictures can be read as a tactical manual for personal autonomy in an increasingly strategised, surveilled city, itself framed as a monochrome dystopia.

Blees Luxemburg's photos are more fun in their reframing of corporate London after hours. Unlike Rickett's monochrome, she used a stylised palette for her street photography, heavy on bleeding colour that gives her pictures the feel of drunken snapshots, blown up to proportions that lend the suggestion of a wider, cinematic narrative: *Chance Encounters (City of London)* (1994), for instance, the artist sharing a joke with two baseball-bat-wielding City boys, their double-breasted suits and goofy grins giving them the air of light-relief goons in a mafia movie. She's described her approach to the series as 'cosplaying' an invented persona, and the sense that even an impersonal business district can be repurposed as an arena for a ludic *dérive* is never far from these pictures.

Regardless of the rationale for the exhibition-book package, the desire to revisit these pictures isn't for any nostalgia for Britart sensationalism; and it's certainly not a prompt from the noisy discourse of contemporary slogan-feminism, as expressed in the book on Rickett's work. Both series are possessed of Situationist nuances that might have been lost in a context of 'Young British Artist' hype and tabloid panic over 'ladette' culture. Since 1994, the mass surveillance Rickett identified in *Pissing Women* has become ever more widespread, to the point we're transmitting personal information from our pockets. Meanwhile, London has become so expensive that the subversive expressions of personal liberty the work communicates seem an altogether alien concept. If we miss the 1990s, well, small wonder.

Digby Warde-Aldam





left Sophy Rickett, *Vauxhall Bridge 2*, 1995, silver bromide print, 50×50 cm.
© the artist. Courtesy Cob Gallery, London

right Rut Blees Luxemburg, *Chance Encounters (City of London)*, 1994,
c-type handcrafted photograph mounted on aluminium, 75×75 cm. © the artist. Courtesy Cob Gallery, London

Jesse Darling *The Contractor*

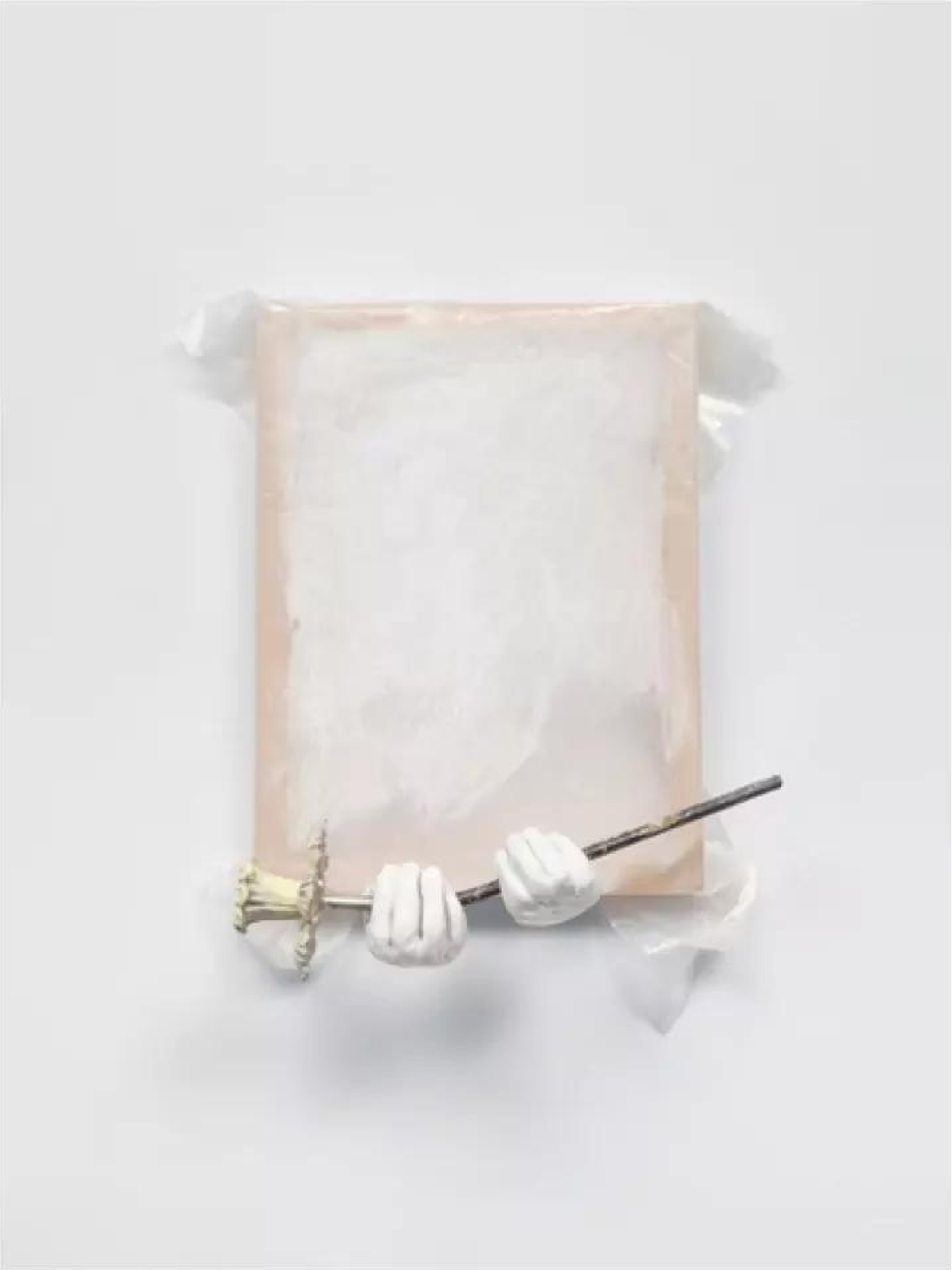
Molitor, Berlin 12 September – 8 November

Jesse Darling's exhibition *The Contractor* is accompanied by an eponymous text, authored by the artist and speaking about himself in the third person. 'The contractor is here in the city with a job to do,' it begins, foregrounding that making art is labour like anything else, its makers subject to alienation effects. If it's particularly difficult to justify artmaking, which 'only serves to reinforce a war machine', amid the daylit nightmare of the 2025 news cycle, this contractor will nevertheless do it anyway, because 'there are kids to feed' and, perhaps, by now – though Darling has in the past publicly mooted quitting art – they've nowhere else to go. The tone is one of pragmatic workaday resignation, near-burnout meeting determination and resulting in deep ambivalence. The gallery's storefront window is half-covered with a sea of painted vertical marks and diagonal strikethroughs, like a prisoner's daily wall markings. There have, these numberless glyphs suggest, been many days like this one to struggle through, and there'll be more.

The chief risk of this framing is that the artworks themselves could be seen as an afterthought, that it doesn't really matter *what* they are. But the inclusions are frequently slippery enough to sidestep that. Some do refer directly to labour and financial matters: the wall-mounted assemblage *Contractor I* (all works but one 2025), one of several works infused with a Funk-art flavour, wraps a ragged hessian moneybag like a shawl around an olive-green welding helmet, topping it off with a decorous metallic filigree of leaves. In *Das Wirtschaftswunder II*, which refuses definition as either a painting or a sculpture – translucent plastic loosely wrapped around a stretcher is daubed with white, while a pair of outstretched hands in white plaster protrude from the lower edge, gripping the stem of a metal daffodil – is titled after the West German 'economic miracle' of the 1950s and 60s. Other pieces ostensibly revolve around notions of home and family but bend their signifiers aslant. The luminously pastel-toned, pencil-and-acrylic drawing *Die Familie*, on a framed scrap of crumpled paper, lines up a female, male and two gender-ambiguous, genital-free figures – one leaning on a bent crutch, a longtime Darling shorthand for damage and support – all nude, heads covered in baglike hoods, and against a background battalion of doodled pointed-roof houses that double as upward-pointing arrows. The results land somewhere between warped cabaret and photos from Abu Ghraib, with the one thing clear about the embattled quartet being that they're in this together.

The chief flavour of such work, with its knotty tangling of iconographies, is a kind of pithy obduracy: you're compelled into looking, but at what you're not entirely sure. That's a quality inherent even in signature-style pieces like *Epistemologies (Amtsschimmel)* (2018/25), a vitrined trio of administrative ring-binders containing not pages but blocks of concrete the size of a ream of A4; and mechanical sculptures like *Der Ordoliberalismus (Home)*, an open-sided wooden box crowned with a doll's-house window that rotates, while a pair of fists poke combatively from the work's base. Things you can't read, things functioning without apparent motive, things that want to punch back, a preponderance of masks: Darling seems to be addressing, in formally diverse ways, how you give and withhold at once, contract yourself out but shelter your soul. If *The Contractor*, accordingly, frequently feels slightly out of reach, that may be not a bug but a feature.

Martin Herbert



Das Wirtschaftswunder II, 2025, wood, steel, clay, plastic, acrylic, 40×35×18 cm.
Photo: Marjorie Brunet Plaza. Courtesy Galerie Molitor, Berlin

Books

Lucy Levers, Judy Ovens & Suzanna Prizeman
Adventurous Vents
A Journey through the Ventilation Shafts of Britain
PARTICULAR BOOKS

Big Kiss, Bye-Bye

by Claire-Louise Bennett   Fitzcarraldo Editions, £12.99 (softcover)

Claire-Louise Bennett's first novel, *Pond* (2015), was a minor sensation when it was published, widely admired for its style and tone, and for the way that it rendered inanimate objects, well… not exactly animate, but shimmering, highly charged by the extraordinary force of the narrator's attention. Fragmentary vignettes were intimated by a writer living in the Irish countryside (one whose circumstances closely resembled Bennett's), with a lyrical voice that was psychedelically lush with descriptive excess; musing on subjects such as a broken knob on her oven, the search for a flip-flop or the merits of porridge, she performed a wild consciousness that seemed to prowl around its habitat. After *Checkout 19*, a 2021 novel centred on youthful becomings, Bennett's third work of fiction, *Big Kiss, Bye-Bye*, returns us to a world that resembles that of *Pond*, though it could be considered as describing its underworld or shadow realm. Now objects and situations seem to darken or curdle under the narrator's attention rather than being electrified by it, creating a book that is, I think, harder to love.

Though similarly fragmentary in structure and featuring a familiar-sounding voice, this is Bennett's most subdued book. Feverish prose occasionally breaks through, but her baseline tone is terse and flattened, quite literally signalling a lack of sparkle: '[M]y glass of prosecco was flat. I asked him if his prosecco was flat and he said he didn't think so, and it didn't look flat – mine looked very flat.' The narrator, who is in the process of moving house, is preoccupied by a correspondence with her former schoolteacher, and ruminations on a long affair with a much older man named Xavier, from whom she has recently become estranged. Xavier does seem very old by the time the novel opens, mostly because he is repeatedly referred to as 'very old', but this relationship is hard to fathom not so much because of what seems like a vast age-gap (40 years?), but because of the way it is so often written in registers of irritation or horror: 'Come here and take hold of me with your old hands and your old mouth. Reach out of your obscene godforsaken darkness into my plush obscene depths and grope your way along.'

But Xavier is one of a triad of older men who are refracted across the narrator's consciousness, and it is not always possible to tell who she is really addressing. The correspondence with her teacher, a grandfatherly man named Terence Stone who taught her English at A-level, brings up powerful memories of a philosophy teacher named Robert Turner, with whom she mentions having 'dealings'. Those 'dealings' remain obscure, but old obsessions and wounds are enflamed by the letters, and these and other nameless figures, such as 'the coward', flicker through the narrator's mind, in fantasy and in memory, leaving us to speculate on the 'true' nature of these relationships.

The novel keeps turning, switching tone. There is a fragment from a lecture about violence, there is Bennett's signature shift in pronoun, from 'I' to 'we', but also to 'you' and to 'she'. At one point, as the narrator begins to teeter into near-ravings about her correspondence with Stone, I suspected that the book might be an autofictional experiment in unreliability or even madness. 'Green', she writes to him, is 'lagoon is guilt is enchantment is mildew is vile is rampant is the colour of my ink yes, the colour of my ink, change, yes, instability, yes, life, life, yes, death, yes. Death.' The novel keeps spinning on its carousel of facets, the narrator performing differently for her many different addressees, yet always setting us back in that dulled-down realism. Here Bennett's immense skill with literary estrangement is recalibrated to produce a nauseous relationship to the world, and an uprooted character who suddenly seems at home nowhere.   *Laura McLean-Ferris*

Magadh

by Shrikant Verma, translated by Rahul Soni   And Other Stories, £14.99 (softcover)

Shrikant Verma's collection of poems (originally published in Hindi in 1984; now reissued in an English translation from 2013) has become something of a totemic text for 'Nayi Kavita', an experimental movement in Hindi literature that combined formal innovation with everyday language and observations. Across some 50 poems, a cast of narrators tell stories of the (actual) ancient kingdom of Magadha and the full tapestry of human life, death, time and loss within it. There's the ancient city of Kapilavastu 'drowned in wine and whores' and the victorious Maharaj whose 'glory / spreads like moonlight', and whose people are 'all afraid / If ever they speak'; there's Shaktar, who able to 'tell a tree / by its roots / thinks and is terrified', and 'doms' (or Dalits) whose 'eyes turn to stone / waiting for corpses / but no corpse arrives'. That Verma was a senior member of and spokesman for the Congress party in the turbulent period of crisis during the late 1970s and early 1980s provides an inescapable subtext to the whole collection. It's as if Verma, from a complicated vantage, is reaching into the ancient past to identify a magisterial state in crisis – and test if it bears any resemblance to the present.

In Rahul Soni's translation, Verma's minimalist poems are made beautiful by their precise syntax and structural interstices: 'if I cannot give voice to you / then you / give me voice', a Vetal says in 'Invocation' (1984); a journeyman puts it exquisitely, 'the / night / deepens / in / Pataliputra' ('Pataliputra', 1979). And though no one expects translation to be faithful, translating *Magadh* was nonetheless a thankless task for Soni – the original Hindi is already so sparse, and full of allusion, that, as Mantra Mukim points out in his afterword, this translation 'speaks for itself as much as the original'. 'Interference' (1984) best captures the transience of the poetic worlds Verma brings to life, married as they are by their allegory for the constant instability we know in our own. '[P]eace must remain in Magadh / if Magadh / is to remain', Verma writes:

> No one even interrupts
> for fear
> of interruption
> becoming the custom in Magadh
>
> Once it starts
> interference never stops –

The details are essential: Soni's introduction of internal rhyme slides the eye down the former stanza; the punctuation in the latter comes like a gash through the page. An obvious counterpoint to *Magadh* would be Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972), but where Calvino's prose thrived in lexical embellishment, Verma's poetics are comparatively suffocating.   *Alexander Leissle*

Adventurous Vents: A Journey through the Ventilation Shafts of Britain

by Lucy Lavers, Judy Owens & Suzanna Prizeman Particular Books, £20 (hardcover)

Architecture is a schizophrenic discipline. On one hand it aspires to grandeur, civicness and significance. Its history books chronicle palaces, monuments and sacred structures, or grand social projects manifesting utopian ideas for transforming society. On the other hand it's a mess: a world of pipes and problems, conduits and compromise. It's as if haute couture was not only fixated on dressing the body as spectacle but also charged with removing verrucas on a Thursday afternoon at a local GP practice. This double life – its intrinsically bathetic nature – is of course what makes architecture so fascinating. Usually understood as serious and ineffable, architecture is, at heart, comedy.

Adventurous Vents revels in architecture's founding contradiction. A coffee-table book (for small coffee tables) that presents 100 British vents. More specifically: bits of substantial ventilation infrastructure that acknowledge the *res publica*. By placing vents – typically peripheral – centre stage, the book reveals things about cities, landscape and architecture that most buildings are too ashamed to admit. The range shows extraordinary variation: chimneys that dream of being castles, exhausts dragged up as campaniles, hollow Potemkin buildings, delicate cast-iron structures that convert sewage methane into street light; modernist shafts with austere silhouettes straight from Aldo Rossi's *Città Analoga*.

The book lets vents tell their own story about the historical and technological development of the city. From the eighteenth century onward there are demands to ventilate, say, mines, the foul atmospheres of industry, transport systems, sanitation and the complexities of modern infrastructure. Each new and necessary rupture between one world and another becomes an architectural struggle to give form to the intake or discharge of air.

There are the decorative Victorian follies in London, like Decimus Burton's chimney-as-campanile for the Palm House boilers at Kew Gardens. There are brutalist examples: The concrete Fibonacci spiral at the Barbican and the spectacular, expressionist Camberwell Submarine providing venting and cooling for nearby housing estates.

There are examples where the practicalities of building services become entwined with human stories – a 71-metre chimney styled as an Italianate brick minaret topped with a domed cupola exhausting Manchester's Strangeways Prison heating system and a small austere but elegant tapered octagonal structure that ventilates HM Prison Portland's sewer system. Both have a tragic quality, portals between two separate worlds, the enclosed incarcerated bodies contrasting with the drifting atmospheres of the world beyond.

There are the ridiculous, like the 23-metre Corinthian-style monument at Paternoster Square. This area, just north of St Paul's Cathedral, was redeveloped in the 1990s at the height of the then-Prince Charles's anti-modernist public interventions. The Paternoster Column's outward appearance is all Portland stone, fluted column and rusticated base, topped with a gilded flaming urn. Its real function though is to vent the traffic gyratory and car park beneath, piping benzine-heavy air through grilles discreetly inserted into its English Baroque form. In the hands of a serious postmodernist, this chronologically impossible, absurd mismatch of form and function, with its awkward disjunctions between modernity and history, could have been made an explicit exploration of the problem of the contemporary city. But the monarch-pleasing, no-fun pomo historicist reality is an object driven by shame, repressing the city's real conditions in favour of architectural fantasy. A Freudian urbanist would read this as displacement, where the baser bodily function (venting, excreting, purging the foul air of the city's guts) is sublimated into the most elevated of architectural forms.

Adventurous Vents revels in an obscure design typology, revealing the marginal as central. This celebration of vents and their awkward disguises and blunt exposures is also a celebration of architecture's double life, its ever-unresolved tension between the profane and the transcendent. Vents here are not just infrastructure but a catalogue of architectural possibilities. Function slips away, form persists as archetype, building becomes rhetoric. Nothing but hot air, and sometimes all the better for it. *Sam Jacob*

Katabasis

by R. F. Kuang Harper Voyager, £22 (hardcover)

In a 2004 essay, religious-studies scholar Charles Hallisey suggests that higher education is not unlike a religion – both involve institutionalised rituals, an understanding of personal lack and knowledge that can never be complete. It is in this space of devotion and penance that R. F. Kuang's sixth novel, *Katabasis*, a thinly veiled satire of academic life, is set. This 500-page odyssey revolves around two Cambridge students of 'Analytic Magick', Alice and Peter, who head to Hell to retrieve their recently dead supervisor, so that they can finish their PhDs – and continue their quest as lifelong scholars.

Hell, as it turns out, is a campus, where each level, à la Dante's *Inferno*, mirrors a university building through which 'Shades' must pass before they can submit their dissertations and 'graduate' to their next lives. Pride, for example, is a library in which Shades have breakdowns in fear of failing vivas; Desire is a student centre in which Shades snort books like cocaine and hump each other in study rooms. When Hell starts to feel unbearable, Alice takes comfort in the knowledge that 'graduate school had prepared her for this, the constant managing of despair'.

Like her other novels featuring jealous, competitive nerds and effortless geniuses, Kuang is most comfortable turning the reality of intellectual life on its head, writing painful stereotypes until they become real and humane. As their journey into Hell unfolds, so does their toxic relationship with Professor Grimes, the supervisor who manipulated them into being consumed by self-doubt, as well as becoming rivals, despite their mutual infatuation. Grimes is a predator who sexually harassed his students ('He likes girls who look like ballerinas... sad, twiggy things with daddy issues') and stole their research. Despite that, Alice still bases her self-worth on his praise – so invested that 'she could not tell where [his] malfeasance ended and where her complicity began'.

But as Kuang's institutional satire meets heavy-duty Hell research and a saccharine love story, *Katabasis* becomes disjointed and full of loose ends. It reads like a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* story for the newly matriculated. *Yuwen Jiang*

Dog Days

by Emily LaBarge Peninsula Press, £12.99 (softcover)

On the evening of 22 December 2009, when the art and literary critic Emily LaBarge was twenty-five, six armed intruders entered the vacation home she and her family had rented on an island in the Caribbean Sea and held them hostage until early morning. Her memoir *Dog Days* opens on a description of her lying on the floor, seeing, through a hole in the blanket that's been put over her head, a stranger's machete dangling from the side of a couch. Towards the end of the book, LaBarge muses about tracing the constellation Canis Major via the 'Dog Star' Sirius, writing, 'I started with the biggest and brightest star because it was the easiest to identify'. She could just as well be referring to the underlying logic of her book: trauma, here, is a vivid, incandescent miasma. Within the radius of its toxic glow, *Dog Days* unfolds in what appear to be a series of journal entries, in which LaBarge logs and comments on the literature, films, psychiatric studies and philosophical texts she consumes obsessively after the home invasion, attempting to come to terms with the extraordinary terror she experienced by way of the cultural forms most available and familiar to her.

Starting from the site of trauma, LaBarge and the reader attempt, together, to connect the dots on a host of related symptoms like insomnia, magical thinking and altered family dynamics, linking these to excerpts from fiction – short stories by Alice Munro, Amy Hempel and Lorrie Moore – and descriptions of films. Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), which deals with the 1982 massacre of Palestinian and Lebanese Shia civilians in Beirut by the Lebanese Forces with support from the IDF, and Frank Capra's Christmas classic, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), both make appearances.

It's a task that culminates in a kaleidoscopic spiral instead of a clear picture, the most convincing moments of which come when LaBarge is describing the 'parodic' and irredeemable details of the invasion – 'chocolate cake smeared on the walls', 'a roasted chicken wrapped in an undershirt' in the bushes, one of the captors sitting down to watch *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) on the television mid-rampage – and when she writes about her dreams involving necromancy, cannibalism and transfiguration. Though it makes sense, given that the hostage-takers are never caught, that LaBarge should likewise deny readers a sense of closure and catharsis, one could argue that without the 'dog star' that is the retelling of the traumatic event, LaBarge's intuitively compiled ruminations would not cohere to form a constellation of ideas at all.

Dog Days undoubtedly orbits around trauma, though it seems to bristle self-consciously against this fact. Throughout the book, LaBarge rails against testimonies that unwittingly or opportunistically add to 'the world of Trauma Stories… demanded and peddled and normalised in so many spheres of contemporary culture'. She implies that she is unlike the 'perfect victim' who sticks to what's called the 'good story', a socially acceptable narrative of events distilled for insurance companies and fair-weather friends. The depth and breadth of her independently motivated research seems to be what is meant to set her story apart from the others. At the same time, LaBarge seems concerned with preemptively countering accusations akin to what literary critic Parul Sehgal wrote in 'The Case Against the Trauma Plot', a viral 2021 *New Yorker* article published on the heels of #MeToo and the COVID-19 pandemic. In that article, Sehgal argued that the 'enshrinement of testimony in all its guises' – including in contemporary memoirs – 'elevated trauma from a sign of moral defect to a source of moral authority, even a kind of expertise'. LaBarge downplays her ability to fathom and communicate her experience by deferring to the voices of other writers, thinkers and researchers, allowing her book to unravel – to be 'protean, malformed – open to irresolution' – lest her readers perceive her as either a teacher or unreliable witness, instead opting for the ambiguity of remaining the perpetual student of trauma. *Jenny Wu*

Goya. The Complete Prints

José Manuel Matilla & Anna Reuter Taschen, £100 (hardcover in slipcase)

'If imitating nature is as difficult as it is admirable when achieved,' wrote Francisco de Goya in a newspaper ad promoting his series *Caprichos* (Caprices) in 1799, 'some esteem should be shown him who, shunning nature entirely, has had to put before the eyes forms and attitudes that until now have only existed in the human mind…' Quoted in *Goya. The Complete Prints*, it's a slightly pushy sales pitch, but then Goya was trying to shift the dial of public taste away from decorous academic art and aristocratic patronage, into something edgier and more modern, drawing the art of printmaking, and his own status as a painter, towards a wider, more progressive public. Under the pretext of giving shape to the visions of his dreams and imagination (to avoid the censor's eye), Goya's *Caprichos* allowed the Spanish master to criticise the moral vices and political failures of the eighteenth-century Spain in which he had made his name. The social satires of the *Caprichos* are one part of *The Complete Prints*, a superb new edition of the artist's etchings and lithographs, along with the relentless horrors of the famed series *Desastres de la guerra* (Disasters of War, 1810–15), the profoundly weird and unsettling fantasies of the *Disparates* (Follies, 1815–24), his early etchings after paintings by Velázquez, the bullfighting series *Tauromaquia* (1816) and the few later lithographs.

The accompanying essays usefully place Goya's works in their art-historical and social context. But they're desperately dry, never venturing further than mild academic excitement about what Goya achieved and heralded. That Goya lived and worked in the momentous decades of European revolution, lived under the absolutism of monarchy and church, worked under censorship and the Inquisition, witnessed invasion and war – it's all noted, but its significance, on modern art, on the politics of the artist's place in society, barely flickers into view.

A biographical essay would have added depth, but what is really missing is a contemporary critical take on why Goya's *Desastres* and *Disparates* remain so powerful and, yes, contemporary. (The 1943 American edition *Complete Etchings*, for example, had a foreword by Aldous Huxley, still powerfully insightful today.) It's a lavish coffee-table book, whose excellent reproduction does Goya's visual brilliance justice, while managing to look past quite how radical an artist he was. *J.J. Charlesworth*

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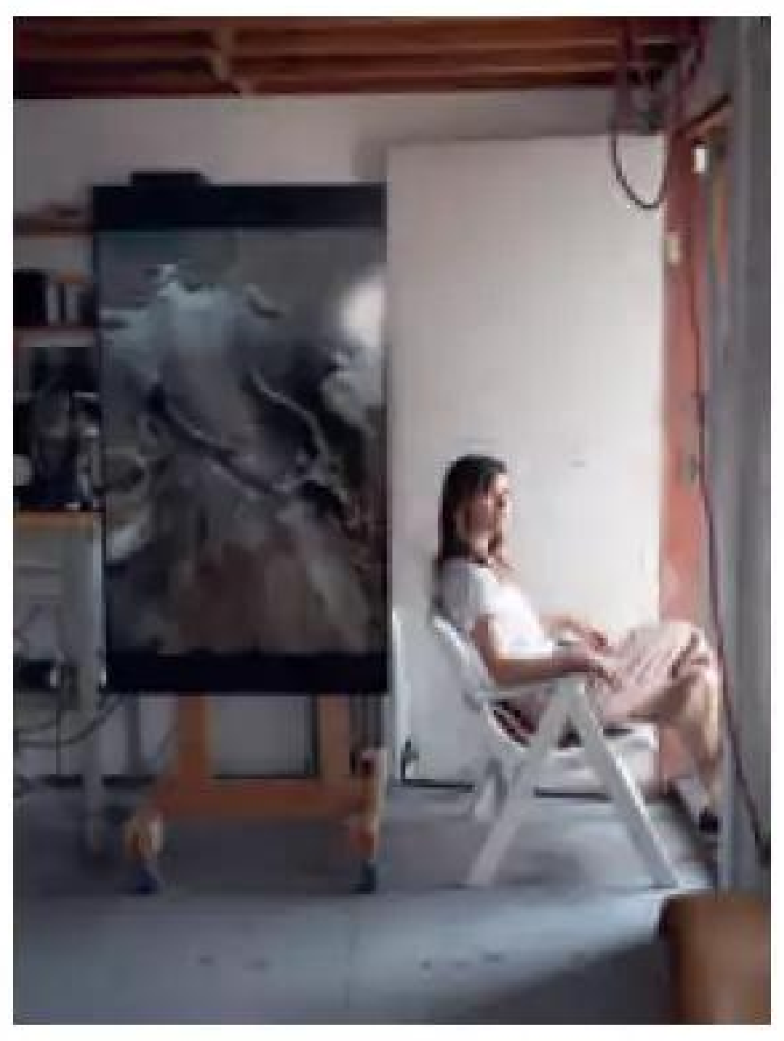

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ArtReview, ISSN No: 1745-9303, (USPS No: 21034) is published by ArtReview Ltd, 1 Honduras Street, London EC1Y 0TH, England, United Kingdom. Subscription records are maintained at ArtReview Subscriptions, Warners Group Publications, The Maltings, West St, Bourne PE10 9PH, United Kingdom. The paper used within this publication is sourced from chain-of-custody certified manufacturers, operating within international environmental standards. This ensures sustainable sourcing of the raw materials and sustainable production.

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Lucy Raven,
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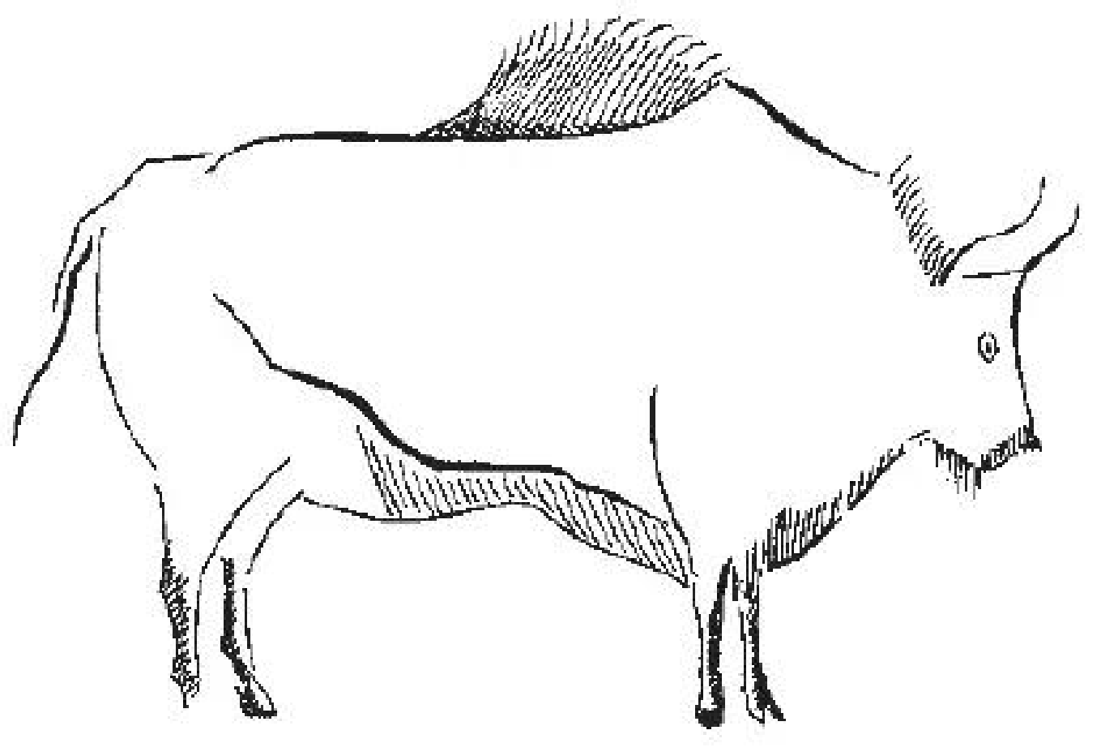

1: A scene; an image; a depiction (real or imagined). No longer necessarily a drawing or painting. **2:** Always lies. It's vital that you check what lies outside the frame before reaching any judgements or conclusions. **3:** Often studied by FBI experts. **4:** Once always had a subject. Since the twentieth century, pictures don't need to be about anything. As far as computers and art historians are concerned, pictures contain 'information'. Although it's unclear what can be 'done' with it. As far as curators are concerned, pictures are given value by their provenance; not by what's inside them. **5:** The first picture was drawn by Kora of Sicyon, who traced the shadow of her lover on a wall, thus inventing graffiti at the same time. In case she forgot what he looked like. Which is basically what pictures are for. To stop people forgetting. Which is also what makes them particularly useful to liars or people to whom it would be helpful if people remembered things differently. Back in Sicyon, Kora's father, Butades, then modelled the drawing in clay, inventing the first relief sculpture in the process. Although, given the lack of detail in Kora's outline, he was probably involved in some degree of lying as well. In the long run it turned out that sculpture was too much hassle when it came to simply remembering. Or creating 'wanted' posters. Drawing was a lot less bother. Until cameras came along. And photographs became what most people meant when they said 'picture'. **6:** Artists famously can't see the bigger one; just what's immediately in front of them. Which is smaller. Only AI has the complete picture. The truly bigger one. Or God. If you believe in them. **7:** Once referred to moving image. In the days when moving image lacked colour and America ruled the world. **8:** In the digital era, pictures will replace words. Which are now redundant. Be sure to tell your friends that pictures speak louder. Preferably on Instagram. So you don't come across as a hypocrite. **9:** Not what art is all about anymore. To suggest or even to think that the opposite is the case is to reveal yourself to be old-fashioned. Or to be the director of a National Portrait Gallery. And no one wants to be that. **10:** Pictures are responsible for the death of the author and turned everyone into a consumer. Today they constitute a wave that constantly threatens to drown all of us. Because today everyone is an author. According to certain Germans, the pictures in this wave are poor images. But that doesn't mean that they are of less value; perhaps the opposite. Or perhaps not.

See also: *Pictures Generation, images, resolution, mechanical reproduction, mythology, hypocrites*

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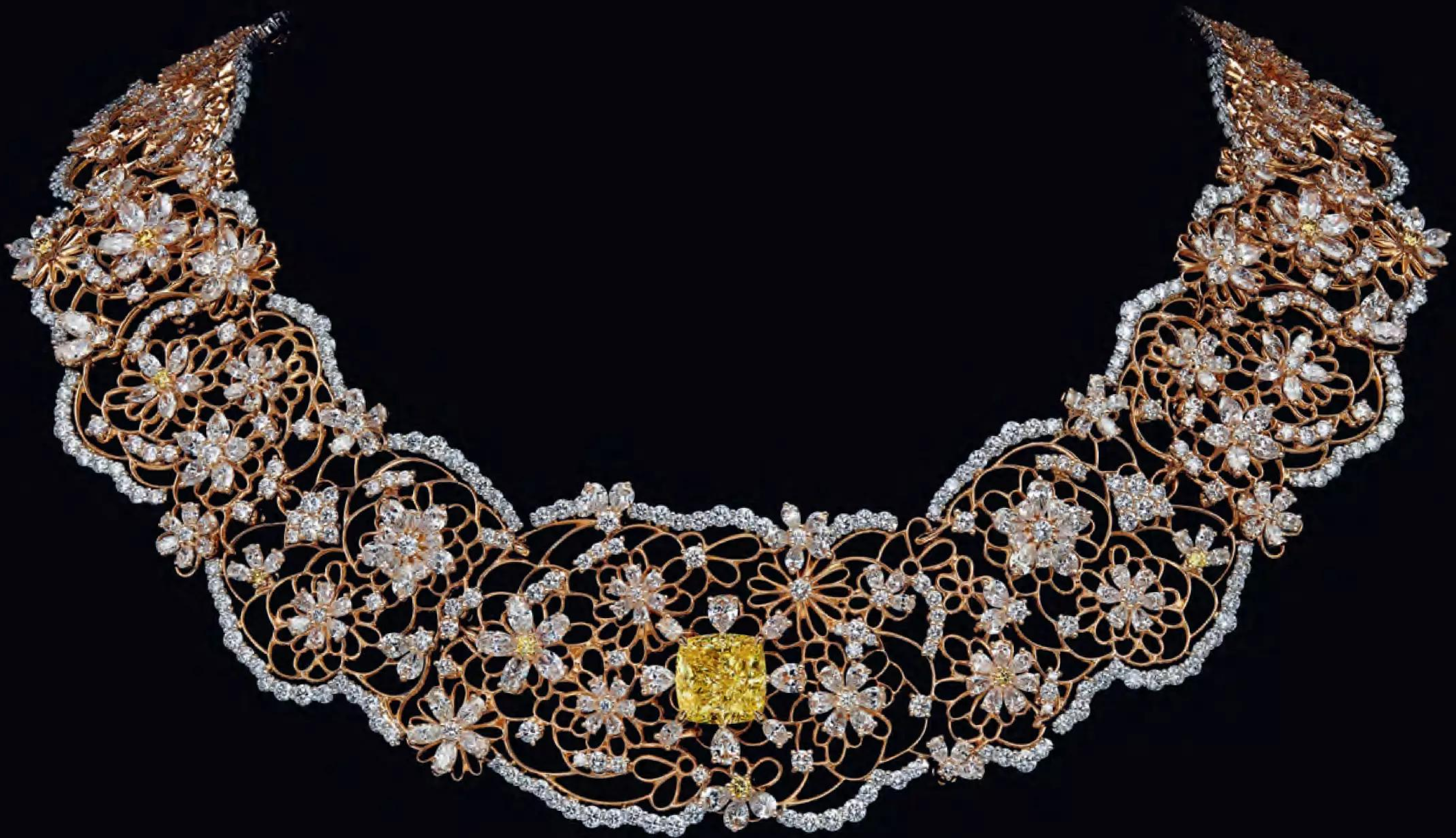

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